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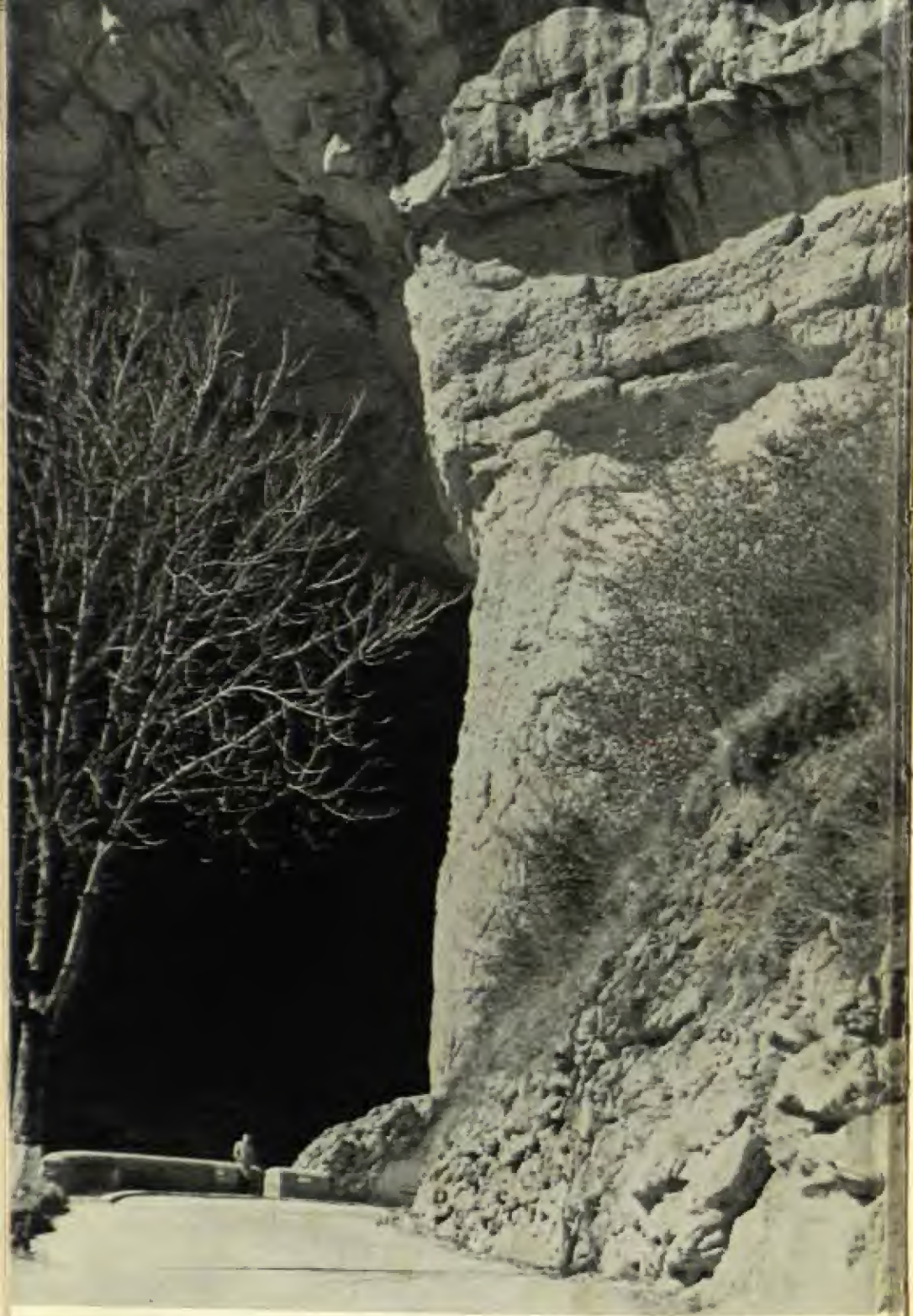


BY THE SAME AUTHOR

*Freedom of the Parish*

*The Englishman's Flora*





Mas d'Azil



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## Preface

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THIS BOOK IS a record of several journeys in a limited search.

I wished to convince myself — and inform myself — about the Old Stone Age art of the caves in France and Spain. When I began, I knew the classic caves only by book and hearsay. I knew the animal images, the bison, the reindeer, the wild horses and red deer and ibex and mammoth and woolly rhinoceros, only by copies and photographs. These are never a substitute for the real thing; and I very soon discovered and confirmed what I already suspected — that the very best of copies and even the best of photographs cannot help distorting the ancient cave-paintings and engravings. They always diminish the force of these strange works of art, always damage their elegance and verve, always falsify them.

So this is a book about my direct response to an art; but it is also about the caves, about the adventure of visiting the caves, about France and Spain and limestone country, and today's circumstances in contrast to the savage conditions which the cave-artists or artist-magicians knew in the Upper Palaeolithic. Also the book deals just a bit with the first discovery of Upper Palaeolithic man and of his art of the caves, and the way in which the art came to be accepted so gradually and so reluctantly.

I should add at once that there are no chapters about the art of the cave-shelters on the Mediterranean side of Spain — which is archaeologically of a different province, and in style and feeling altogether of a different school. But then a book of reactions cannot pretend to react to everything or to be expertly art-historical or expertly archaeological.

If archaeologists find archaeological mistakes, I hope they will be kind. They should be, because textbooks which deal with the Upper Palaeolithic are now, I am assured by an archaeologist, just about twenty or thirty years behind the advance of knowledge. They will agree, at any rate, that the fact of the art of the caves is an astounding one in human history; and is wonderfully worth celebrating — in all the possible and appropriate ways.

I am grateful to my friend Carl Nesjar of Oslo for his photographs of the Vézère Valley, Lascaux, Cougnac, Pech-Merle, Cap

Blanc, Teyjat and Niaux. For other photographs I must thank M. Romain Robert of Tarascon-sur-Ariège (Mas d'Azil); A. F. Kersting (Les Trois Frères); Mr A. G. Thompson (Bacon Hole); the French Government Tourist Office (Plates 14 and 19) and the Commission Internationale d'Art Préhistorique (No. 3). The other photographs are my own.



# I

## The Red Lady

---

IT IS A PLEASANT journey to the caves, to the beginnings of art, or, if not the beginnings, then to the most ancient images, the most ancient paintings in red ochre and black manganese, the most ancient engravings, the most ancient carvings, which have come down to us, or which we have yet discovered.

The sun had shone steadily for most of the way through France, on a journey which had afforded a cross-section through jumbled layers of the arts of man. I leant back and thought, full of wine, coffee, cream-cheese I had bought in the morning's market, and *andouillettes* I had cooked on a stove, by this stream, under poplar trees tall and naked up to a high leafage which shaded me just enough from the mid-morning sun: I was near Lascaux, and the long road I had left for a while had led me to gardens of art and pleasure: to Ermenonville up in the north, where Rousseau lay buried for a while on an island in the lake; to Versailles, which had fountains, alleys of trees all made to lean one way, and grottoes, which are caves of artifice; to Rambouillet, where Clouet took the death-mask of Francis I, where there had been more caves of artifice, and a pastoral cottage patterned with pale blue mussel shells, in which elegant ladies could play at being elegant milkmaids.

The main roads from the dividing English Channel had taken me to cathedrals, to Beauvais, immense, narrow, fragmentary, grey, dirty, northern, rising in the rain so slenderly (to change to the outer view) above a town cracked by war; to Chartres, when the sun was already extreme outside the great doorway, which I had entered — this is nearer the feeling of the caves — as into the centre of all solemn blackness or black coolness, as into a cool enormous planetarium designed only for that sparkle and those impossible yet natural colours the sun was driving through the glass (colours chiefly a mingling of the cornflowers and the poppies which grew along the road from Rambouillet to Chartres); a divine cave — all caves are divine — in which I was distracted from the

blue and scarlet only by tiny candle stars twinkling deep inside the blackness, at a lower level, around the altar of the Virgin.

After a while I had sickened of the resumed glare of the road onward to the south-west and the caves; I had made a detour below Chartres which had landed me in Illiers. Here Proust lived and first knew the world and the hawthorns, here was a medallion of the great man in bloodless plaster hanging above aspidistras in a hotel across the square from a church full of peonies and the scent of peonies, below a painted roof; here they preserve that house from which, in the lost yet recovered time, Tante Léonie observed the lives of 'Combray' through windows of a room upstairs, in which she gave the child the magic scraps of *petite madeleine* soaked in lime-tea.

I had been inveigled into that dull house.

From Illiers or Combray there had been still a long way to go, two hundred and fifty miles at least, to art created twenty, nearer thirty thousand years before the mind of this Marcel Proust also created, 'face to face', as he said (and the process was not so different), 'with something which did not so far exist', to which his mind alone 'could give reality and substance, which his mind alone could bring into the light of day'. Illiers is on the Loir in the department of Eure-et-Loir. I had to go on towards the Pyrenees, crossing, under the yellow broom of so many medieval love-songs, both Loir-et-Cher and Indre-et-Loire, until I had reached greyer Vienne and Haute-Vienne and Charente, and at last the Dordogne, until I had at last reached that backbone, that substance, that limestone, which was shelter, and which was also the canvas, the block, the plate, and the condition, of schools of art.

In less than two hours I should be at Lascaux. I had bathed, eaten, slept. I watched small beetles blue as lapis lazuli tropically poised upon flowerheads, I listened to a golden oriole fluting to itself in a splendidly unornithological, invisible way high in the poplars (the fluting is echoed by the name, by this English *oriole* or the French *loriot*, if you say either word slowly and repeatedly); and I thought about the landscape, the whole milieu, *then*, and the landscape and the whole milieu, *now*. And with some misgivings. Ridden by historians of art, aren't we told against all sense and possibility, that we must reconstruct their original environment, their original climates of thought, feeling, practice, if we are to 'understand' works of art?



I was in a limestone gorge, by a stream: wasn't the art of the painted caves, in other gorges, along the Vézère, along the Beune, the Célé, going to seem altogether appropriate to *now*, and not *then*?

I had stopped the car exactly by a tall Military Orchid: wasn't the art going to agree with the wild orchids, the grass, the pinks on the grey rock, the wild lavender, the whole limestone richness of vegetation (at any rate along the floor of each canyon), and all the warmth of the rock; whereas *then* the same hard surfaces wore a different, chillier aspect?

How should one 'reconstruct' — the hateful word — a climate, so long past, of thought and feeling? Also a cold climate of actuality?

The glaciers then advanced, the glaciers shrank back to the Alps and, in the north, towards Scotland and Denmark. The wizened-faced ancestors of these Frenchmen of Vienne, of Dordogne, crouched then out of the frozen and freezing wind under the long louching overhangs of limestone (though the short summer might at times be pleasant enough), while up above the milieu of the animals they drew, the bison, the reindeer, the wild horse, the hairy mammoth, and woolly rhinoceros, was a windy, noisy, comfortless area of loess or tundra or pine-barrens, of bare stony earth and black pools, of ice and snow, and solifluction or the downhill crawling of water-logged surfaces above a subsoil permanently frozen.

It would be hard as one walked through flowers into a cave, or as one emerged from a cave into an aroma of newly-turned hay, to return the hunting artists to so cruel an environment, like a book returned to a dull library; to smear out the modern picture, to substitute such a landscape as they know in Greenland between the ice-cap and the sea; for the clear sky overhead at this moment, to substitute broken cloud and storms; to drain away the heat which warmed the day and the rock, and replace it with the bitterness of the winds from the north-east, from the ice which covered north Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, all of the Baltic, and to blacken the air with those pitiless midges and mosquitoes which spoil the Greenland summer.

Or so I thought. I was in Montignac an hour later, crossing the Vézère and threading the street behind a car from Sweden and a car from California. We turned off, climbed the hill to Lascaux, came to the scrub of pines, juniper, *bruyère*; parked, walked to the café

under the pines, to the stalls where they sell pots decorated with those bulls and deer and horses everyone has come to see, and to the iron doors leading underground through portals of concrete; and it was then the storm came, the sky quickly blackened, the rain pelted, the mugs and the postcards were thrust under cover, the tables were deserted, and Englishmen, Swedes, Danes, Americans, Australians, Belgians, Dutchmen, Indonesians, ran back for shelter to their cars.

A milieu was recreated — in spite of misgivings. The storm cleared. The guides had not come back from lunch. The storm renewed itself, cleared again, and the guides arrived. A crowd surged towards the steps, and the lights failed, and the crowd waited. American boys from California fidgeted, yelled, kicked their father. The guides began to take in two or three at a time, with electric torches. A milieu, and perhaps not the right milieu, though here was one of the nastier moods of this limestone country between the Dordogne and the Pyrenees; not one of the colder moods, because the heat and the whole air were oppressive and suffocating.

While I waited, and while this world withdrew its smile, I had time to make the milieu worse still, at least in mind; time to think again of the hunters of the Old Stone Age in some of the places they had frequented — nearer the mark — in England and in Wales, not so far from the northern glaciers, when there was still no water to bar the way between Calais and Kent, East Anglia and the Low Countries, England and the Russian steppes, either to beast or to man.

Several of these places I had known before I, or anyone else, had ever heard of Lascaux. The Gower, for example, that jut of land which breaks to the sea in limestone cliffs and long beaches, out beyond Swansea. In the caves of the Gower — nearly sixty of them are known and have been explored palaeontologically — the cave earth has given remains of most of the typical animals of the hunter artists: cave bear and horse, bison, mammoth, and woolly rhinoceros, for example, red deer and reindeer — and also of the hyenas which fed upon them no less than man; and when there is poor light, and rain sweeps over Carmarthen Bay, this plateau above the sea turns dismal and altogether sub-arctic. Curlew mourn away over low hedges, a herd of bison would not seem out of place, black and wet in the rain, on the naked back of Cefn y Bryn, long-haired



mammoths might tread out of the limestone glens towards Llanmadoc or Oxwich, half in, half out of the sea clouds.

Or go, if you want a preliminary taste of the palaeolithic, to the country around Creswell Crags along the border of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. Here was a grassy, mossy country, a park tundra nearer the retreating glaciers which still laid their enormous weight upon Scotland and the North of England, hundreds of feet thick. The caves among Creswell Crags, a small limestone gorge (with a colliery at one end and a sewage plant at the other), were dens of mankind as well as hyena dens, giving shelter from the ice-cap winds scything then across uplands of prehistory which were to become the historical Sherwood Forest. Great collieries, Creswell's own colliery included, give a new accent to this cold open country (much as the tall steel-works of Swansea and Llanelly nearby give an accent to the Gower), yellow buses rumble below the caves, Welbeck Abbey hides behind its plantations; but it takes little effort, now the Forest has disappeared, to picture the herbage, mile after mile of it, which the mammoths plucked with their peculiar bilobed specialized trunks, the long grass, the flowers, the moss and lichen (it was not quite the same as a modern tundra), the bare patches, the dwarf willows starry with catkins, dwarf birches — to picture, in a rolling landscape still forbidding enough, an environment less kind to man than to reindeer, bison, wild horse, rhinoceros, and those enormous elephants protected from the cold by an overcoat of rusty hairs eighteen inches long, on top of two inches of woolly underhair growing on a hide three-quarters of an inch thick, which in turn covered a cosy three and a half inches of fat — fat worth hunting for, no less than the meat or the ivory.

The hair, the underhair, the hide, the fat, speak vigorously of the conditions of life.

These two regions, the Gower and the neighbourhood of Creswell Crags, each, as it happens, have made their special addition to the tale of Upper Palaeolithic man. In the summer of 1822 the curate and the surgeon of one of the Gower villages found their way into the grey gash of Goat's Hole, which is in the cliffs, west of the farm of Paviland, about thirty-five feet above the sea. They picked up some oddments, two mammoth molars, and part of a mammoth's tusk. There were other finds, and the news came to the Reverend William Buckland, Oxford's newly appointed Reader in Geology,

learned, pious, assiduous, wedded or welded at this time entirely to ideas of a last universal deluge, which at one blow, at one rush, had extinguished such mighty mammals as the mammoth and the woolly rhinoceros.

Buckland had been investigating bones and caves in Yorkshire. In 1823, in top hat and tail coat (so he pictures himself at work in the cave) and with black cloth bag, he clambered over the sea-torn limestone into Goat's Hole, and with his workmen — since the archaeologist of the nineteenth century presided and directed, while workmen (instead of students) shovelled and picked and crow-barred and, when necessary, blasted for him — soon recovered more remnants of mammoth, and of rhinoceros, horse, bear, hyena, and reindeer.

Six inches down in the cave-earth, at a point where the earth had scarcely been disturbed, Buckland came upon another mammal: he uncovered, or his workmen uncovered, nearly the entire left side of a human skeleton. Buckland did not know (in fact, did not want to know) the splendour of his luck, the wonderful nature of this find which had been waiting so long for him in this insignificant hole in the cliffs of Gower. Though much of the cave-earth was mixed, here were remnants of mammoth, rhino, wild horse, here were tools of flint, here were human bones — *together*; here, could Buckland only have understood, only have wished to understand, was everything in one convenient and revealing complex.

The bones, to his puzzlement, were red — brick-red, 'enveloped', he wrote, 'by a coating of a kind of ruddle . . . which stained the earth, and in some parts extended itself to the distance of about half an inch around the surface of the bones'. So the skeleton, or half skeleton, became (since he thought the bones were those of a woman) the 'Red Lady of Paviland', the farm above the cliff. With the Lady were not only a number of small sea-shells, small winkles, which fell to dust, but some short pieces of rod which had been carved of mammoth ivory. Buckland, though, was quite sure that his Red Lady and the other bones were not coeval. The other bones were 'diluvian' remains of 'antediluvian' creatures: they were flood relics, washed into Goat's Hole by that last universal deluge described in the Old Testament; and at the end of his list of finds he wrote, with the firmest assurance, 'Man . . . Portion of a female skeleton, clearly postdiluvian.'



Remember, though, the close human horizons of 1823. In the margins of the Authorized Version of the Bible there were still printed those dates worked out by James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, as long ago as 1650, before Wren had built St Paul's or Newton had pondered on gravitation. *In the beginning God created the Heaven and the earth. . . . And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let dry land appear: and it was so.* And in the margin, and firmly in the general mind, Archbishop Ussher's date for this was 4004 B.C.

Buckland's horizon was not altogether fixed by an exact 4004 B.C., but as a divine and a geologist his duty, as far as possible, was to make geology and the Bible agree. The record of the fossils, and the clear bedding of stratum upon stratum, life series upon series, which the new canal engineering of Buckland's day made inescapably clear — these things raised doubts and demanded some readjustment of the mind, some broader interpretation of Genesis. Buckland, like others, had not found that too much of a poser. He followed Baron Cuvier in France, a good naturalist but in his geological notions an upholder of the Flood. Cuvier settled the difficulty of fossils by plumping for a series of independent, improving creations, following a series of stupendous catastrophes and destructions of life. The last creation was man's; the last catastrophe, five or six thousand years ago, was the Flood.

Cuvier's theories had been in his mind when, three years before discovering this Red Lady in Goat's Hole, Buckland read himself into his new Oxford dignity with an Inaugural Lecture in which he pronounced that the Mosaic account, 'as far as it goes', was 'in perfect harmony with the discoveries of modern science'. Only Geology went further — further than Moses; Geology showing that the present system of this planet was built 'on the wreck and ruins of one more ancient'.

If his listeners in their gowns in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford were uneasy, they were soon reassured. 'There is nothing in this', said their new Reader in a disturbing science which now seemed not so disturbing after all, 'inconsistent with the Mosaic declaration, that the whole material universe was created in the beginning; and though Moses confines the detail of his history to the preparation of this Globe for the reception of the human race, he does not deny the prior existence of another system of things, of which it was



quite foreign to his purpose to make mention, as having no reference to the destiny or to the moral conduct of created man.'

And when was man created? Still upon the Sixth Day. This was Buckland's case, that 'the beginning' of the very first sentence of Holy Writ was a period — perhaps millions of millions of years — during which the matter of the universe was called into being and destructions and creations succeeded one another. Then, at last, there followed the Six Days — some geologists and theologians, but not Buckland, considered that each 'day' might be stretched into thousands of years — the Six Days of a new creation, preparing the earth for mankind and coming to a head in Man's creation.

An all-powerful God, a great Demiurge, could work by fiat, Buckland was quite sure, if he willed to do so. So actually upon the Sixth Day this Demiurge invented Man, his special creature. So for Man, if not for the world passing through its earlier convulsions and revolutions, Archbishop Ussher's 4004 B.C. remained, more or less; still giving to our life upon a perfected earth a span of some six thousand years, or enough to allow for a proper interval between the Mosaic Creation and the Mosaic Flood.<sup>1</sup>

Before man, and the animals created with man, of course there had been animals in that long epoch of 'the beginning', there had been the preadamite creatures of the fossil record.

And the Flood?

*And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and everything that is in the earth shall die.* The Flood explained the bones of animals — so many of them of extinct kinds — in caves, such as Goat's Hole. Moreover, the Flood, it seemed to Buckland and the less daring geologists — this event (they are Buckland's words in the dedication of his cave researches — his *Reliquiae Diluvianae* of 1823 — to a bishop of the Church of England) 'in the reality of which the truth of the Mosaic record is so materially involved' — could be saved, and was saved by the evidence of the caverns. It seemed to Buckland — at first — that the fossilized bony evidence from caves at home and caves abroad and the evidence of water-borne deposits were proofs of that universal flood described by

<sup>1</sup> Modern estimates would place the emergence of man as a tool-making animal, the development of *Pithecanthropus* from his more apish predecessors, five hundred thousand or more years ago.

Moses and allowed by Baron Cuvier, by which, five or six thousand years ago, so many species were made extinct. Bones were dragged into caves by hyenas, bones were remnants of antediluvian creatures which had fallen into caves, bones were drifted still further into caves when the waters came; or bones were washed by the very Flood from the surface into caves.

Geology witnessed blessedly to God, argued Buckland, partly because it shewed, no less than the Bible, that man who was king of a special kingdom of nature, had been created after the Long Beginning. There were fossil creatures or prints of creatures deep in the rocks, yes, but no fossil man. At that time at any rate, there was no indisputable evidence for fossil man, no skull, no skeleton which could not be otherwise explained.

Also the universal Mosaic Flood had occurred too soon after this creation of man for mankind (only eight generations separated Adam from Noah) to have spread very far over the earth. Man could not have reached the North, said Buckland. So the article of his Christian and geological faith that there was no fossil man extended to the caves in the North: if in such a cavern there were found both mammoth bones and human bones, it was certain that they could not be of the same age, certain that, in some way, the human bones had been introduced during a later time.

Was the Red Lady of Paviland, then, a puzzle, an apparent contradiction, a witness against Moses, Baron Cuvier, and a Demiurge's creation on the Sixth Day? She was not. Goat's Hole had been no mere den of hyenas, who had dragged into it the bones of antediluvian creatures. It was, so Buckland convinced himself, the stub of a greater cavern, most of which had vanished in the Flood; into this stub had been washed the miscellaneous bones; whereas the Red Lady, so carefully buried, with shells, with ivory rods and ivory amulet, had been a later inset: she was a youngish Red Lady, who had to do with the 'British camp' on the cliff top above Goat's Hole, she was only 'anterior to, or coeval with, the Roman invasion of this country'. To be sure, her amulet, her rods, had been carved of that mammoth tusk which had been found in the cave. But why not, if the Romano-British cave-squatters had themselves found this antediluvian, more exactly diluvian, tusk lying there?

The charcoal which Buckland observed and the flint implements and chips which he unearthed, though he scarcely mentions them,



were Romano-British as well, he concluded; most certainly not of an era before the Flood.

Three years after the adventure of Goat's Hole, Buckland — Dean Buckland, Dean of Westminster, as he was to become — faced in another cave, in Kent's Hole above Torquay, a situation less easy to evade. At Goat's Hole he had had the excuse of a floor evidently disturbed at some earlier date. In Kent's Hole he had no excuse. There another priest, a humble Father MacEnergy, chaplain to the old Catholic family of the Carys of Torre Abbey who helped to make Torquay into a Victorian watering-place, had been quietly digging and exploring before the great geologist's arrival. In several parts of the cave he came upon flint knives in company with antediluvian bones. This time knives and bones were sealed in below an unbroken layer of stalagmite.

The conclusion was obvious — that tools and bones were of an age, after all.

Father MacEnergy argued with himself, Buckland argued with him. Buckland, the Bible, and all the accepted mass of opinion inclined the poor Father not to believe the evidence of his eyes and excavations, inclined him to the more comfortable opinion that, somehow, these sealed-in flints were post-diluvian, after all. Yet, he said to himself, in notes for a book he never published, 'I feel obliged in candour to state the ground which would seem to countenance the opposite hypothesis.'

Buckland would — and could — have no such opposite hypothesis. Buckland preferred a hypothesis of his own, inclining 'to attribute these flints to a more modern date by supposing that the ancient Britons' — those convenient Britons again — 'had scooped out ovens in the stalagmite and that through them the knives got admission to the diluvium' — the deposit, that is to say, laid down by the Flood.

Is there anything to choose between this Oxford cleric's unreasonable reasoning in 1826 and the reasoning of those priests of Valencia who had once venerated the huge back tooth of a mammoth because they believed it to be a tooth of St Christopher, that saint of the stature of a giant who had eaten men before he was converted?

MacEnergy's reply — in his notes — was absolute. 'Without stopping to dwell', he wrote, 'on the difficulty of ripping up a solid floor which notwithstanding the advantages of undermining and the

exposure of its edges, still defies all our efforts, tho' commanding the apparatus of a quarry, I am bound to say' — what more could be said? — 'that in no instance have I discovered evidence of breaches or ovens in the floor.'

The floor, in fact, was 'one continuous plate of stalagmite diffused uniformly over the loam'.

This Reverend William Buckland, Fellow of the Royal Society, Doctor of Divinity, Canon of Christ Church, was an investigator who never tired, a brilliant teacher and inspiriter, a sane mirthful eccentric who treated his guests at Oxford to experimental meals of mice on toast, bear, hedgehog, even crocodile. (He had arrived home with his dead, skinned bear wrapped up in a travelling rug. 'Now, children,' he said, 'guess what this is, and I'll give you a penny.') Fossils cluttered his canonry, a round table in his drawing-room was made of coprolites, or fossilized dung, candles on his mahogany sideboard stood cheerfully on the fossilized vertebrae of saurians; enamoured of the power of Peruvian guano, he sowed the letters *guano* with this new fertilizer in the close turf of Tom Quad outside his canonry, to enforce its merit by the green letters of an extra tall luxuriance. He was a man of charm, energy, and persuasiveness.

Yet sympathize as one may with his intellectual, spiritual, religious difficulties, Buckland was an intellectual eel, he was ready to squirm ridiculously out of a dilemma. 'Dead flies', one could have quoted against him out of his own Book, 'cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.' He did, it is true, conclude later on that his northern flood which had so violently truncated caverns and washed bones into their penetralia, could not, after all, have been Noah's more gentle cataclysm. Yet all too obedient to his preconceptions and his piety, Buckland had missed his chance at Goat's Hole. The bones of his British Red Lady, who was not British at all, lay disregarded, more or less, in the University Museum at Oxford, to which he gave his collections, where they may still be examined, high up on a wall under the Museum's fantastically fretted and Ruskinian roof of iron Gothic, femur, tibia, fibula, still sanguine with the ochre of life, haunch bone, and a few bones of the feet, and a few ribs.

Years after — but much had happened meanwhile to drive back the horizon of our race — it was recognized that the bones of the



Red Lady and the bones of the extinct animals of the cave had worn their flesh at the same time. And nearly a hundred years later another geologist from Oxford, armed with half a century's accumulation of knowledge and inference about the men of the last phases of the Old Stone Age, came again to this hole in the savage cliff, examined it again, excavated it to the last inch, and concluded from tools of flint and from bones charred by fire and split for their marrow that Goat's Hole had been occupied on and off for long in the very long epoch of the ancient hunters.

Re-examined also, the Red Lady now changed, more stirringly if less romantically or sentimentally, to a Red Man of Paviland. The reddened bones were those, in fact, of a man, a young tall 'Aurignacian', a little over twenty-five years old when his companions buried him in this cave above the sea—or, more likely in those days, above the wide valley of an extended Severn.

Could he only have recognized it, had the mental climate of the age and his own personality only allowed him to recognize it, Dr Buckland had lit upon the first of the ancient mammoth hunters of Europe, of mankind, to be discovered; and this huntsman here, in association with the ancient animals of the hunt, was akin to the first painters of France, to the men who entered the many-coloured crystalline strangeness of the caves; a strangeness to which they added by placing their hands upon the wall and spreading their fingers and blowing a mouthful of red ochre around them, leaving a pattern of strange stencillings.

So this Goat's Hole and its Red Lady or Man stand at the beginning of the rediscovery of the most ancient art, a prelude to the gorges, the caves and half-caves of the Dordogne.

## II

### A Horse and a Tooth

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BUCKLAND, Goat's Hole, and the ochred bones — here had been a tale of refusing to believe, refusing to interpret, against the evidence. The brief tale of another cavern among Creswell Craggs is one, in a different mental atmosphere, of anxiety to believe — at least of anxiety to make claims — and perhaps to fake the evidence. There was nothing dismal about Creswell Craggs eighty years ago, there was not that sewage, that colliery I have mentioned. The Duke of Portland, the eccentric nobleman who built Welbeck Abbey downwards into the ground instead of upwards into the air, preserved the Craggs for their beauty. When the railway from Mansfield to Worksop was projected, he had taken care that it should run west of the Craggs, leaving their solitude unimpaired. Across the small stream which flowed down the gorge he had built a dam, so that a lake divided its two sides from end to end, reflecting the grey and black and yellow rocks and the green foliage. (Plate facing page 48.)

Here one day in 1870, a workman, perhaps a quarryman or lime-burner, found the lump of a mammoth's tooth. The news spread. In 1872 another tooth was picked up among the Craggs, this time of the woolly rhinoceros; and three years later a Derbyshire geologist, a cleric once more, the Reverend John Magens Mello, arrived and began to dig — to dig into the floors of Robin Hood Cave, the Pin Hole, Church Hole, and Mother Grundy's Parlour, brief caverns which open in this little canyon below canopies and strings of ivy and through a growth of elders.

Much had happened, as I say, since Buckland came to his wrong conclusions about the Red Lady; much had happened between 1823 and 1875, between Buckland and Parson Mello, or rather Buckland and Boyd Dawkins, the more celebrated geologist (at that time lecturer in geology at Manchester) who shared the overlordship with Parson Mello, as the workmen — archaeology still not liking to soil its fingers — now began to break through the undisturbed, stratified, sealed-in layers of Robin Hood Cave. That mankind in Western



Europe was coeval with mammoth and wild horse and woolly rhinoceros was well enough established at last, and widely enough admitted. There had been protests, bitterness, hedging, rearguard actions, but Fossil Man was at last a fact. At home William Pengelly, a Cornish seaman from Looe turned geologist, had settled the trouble of the Devonshire caves. At Brixham, across the bay from Kent's Hole, quarrymen in 1858 had broken by accident into what Pengelly called a 'virgin cave which had been hermetically sealed during an incalculably long period'. Kent's Hole was anything but virgin and had always been open, a fact urged against the evidence of man's antiquity which it had provided. Pengelly attacked this new cave with care and cunning, under an irreproachable committee of scientists. The world had to be convinced. Making no trial pits, he first removed the stalagmite floor, then worked down layer by layer, examining, sifting, removing each deposit. In twelve months this virgin cave was emptied. Pengelly's men had started in July. In September he had already given himself the pleasure of telling a crowded house of the British Association at Leeds, all the great geologists attending, that 'eight flint tools had already been found in various parts of the Cavern, all of them inosculating' — excellent word, signifying that flints and bones were compacted in the cave deposit — 'with bones of mammalia, at depths varying from nine to forty-two inches in the cave-earth, on which lay a sheet of stalagmite from three to eight inches thick; and having *within* it and *on* it relics of lion, hyena, bear, mammoth, rhinoceros, and reindeer'.

Pengelly, like other Victorian scientists, put facts into one black bag, beliefs into another. He told a correspondent that geologists could now see no way of reconciling geological science with 'the commonly-received interpretation of the Mosaic account of Creation' and that he himself was sure that science could do nothing for the salvation of the soul; though the Bible, notwithstanding, could 'make us wise unto salvation'. In the seventies another letter of Pengelly's allows a glimpse of his view of Dean Buckland, now as dead and buried (he was born in 1784 and died in 1856) as his equivocations. 'Buckland mentions hippopotamus', he chances to say, 'amongst the remains in Kirkdale Cave' — which Buckland had exposed in Yorkshire — 'and I see Boyd Dawkins places him there (the hippopotamus, not Buckland).'

Buckland, indeed, was himself fossil by now. He had joined the

cave animals. By 1872 his ideas, his articles, or reservations, of belief, had become antediluvian and extinct, as Victorian science shook itself clear of the dogmas of Faith.

At home, too, and abroad there had been other developments and discoveries. Words, formulations, schemes of human sequence and evolution had been devised. It was common thought by now that men had made tools of stone, then tools of bronze, then tools of iron. An indisputable, or less easily disputable, fossil man — at least his skull accompanied by some of his bones — had been discovered by workmen in a little cave in the limestone Neanderthal, sixty feet above the river Düssel, not far from Düsseldorf, in 1856, two years before Pengelly's work at Brixham, three years before Darwin imparted a new shudder to the world of accepted but insecure belief by publishing his theory that living creatures — including man — had evolved from earlier and simpler forms, progressively. New words were on men's lips, including *palaeolithic*, 'old stony', for the stage of making rough or not so fine implements of stone, and *neolithic*, 'new stony', for the stage of finer implements, before the stages or ages of metal. Brixham's flints-cum-bones were no longer the only acknowledged 'inosculations'. At various times, in various countries, between the emergence of the Red Lady in Wales in 1823 and the Brixham delvings of 1858, excavators had come upon tools and bones in situations which had persuaded the excavators, if no one else, of the antiquity of man. Flint axes without hafts (or throwing stones?) which early man held in his right hand, were also found with bones of rhinoceros and mammoth just across the Channel in the valley of the Somme, near Abbeville, which is twelve miles up from the sea. Having a harbour, Abbeville had also a customs house, at the head of which was an enthusiastic amateur archaeologist, Boucher de Perthes, luckily a persistent man, well armoured against ridicule. He found his axes and bones twenty to thirty feet down in sand-pits and gravel-pits on the sad outskirts of Abbeville. Though he had made his first discoveries more than twenty years before Pengelly's work at Brixham, though he had published them, it was the unsealing of the Brixham inosculations which were now the real cause of conviction. With Pengelly's triumph in mind, antiquaries and geologists scrutinized the older discoveries, they scrutinized Boucher de Perthes', they at last accepted them, as evidence of man's most unbiblical antiquity.



Extraordinary years these were, for the English especially, between 1850 and the eighteen-seventies. If it was not bliss at that dawn to be alive, it was excitement, needing a strong digestion. Truth and Doubt rose up, and beckoned, and glittered like the panes of the Crystal Palace of 1851 among the foliage of Hyde Park. Prophets and practitioners rose up demanding truth in painting (provided by the Pre-Raphaelites), truth in literature, in religion, in science, in thought, in action; in scrutinizing, too, the problems of wealth and poverty. You could evade, you could be like that old person of Bar (these are poems of the time)

*Who passed all her life in a jar,  
Which she painted pea-green, to appear more serene,  
That placid old person of Bar.*

You could despair and also evade, like that old man whose despair

*Induced him to purchase a hare:  
Whereon one fine day, he rode wholly away,  
Which partly assuaged his despair.*

Or firm among old faiths, you could ally yourself to the bishops, the clergy, the unshakable fundamentalists, indeed to 'that ecclesiastical spirit, that clericalism, which in England,' said the first of the Huxleys, 'as everywhere else, and to whatever denomination it may belong, is the deadly enemy of science'. But bishops were assailable, were actually assailed, and in public.

By Darwin, man was now made 'in substance and in structure, one with the brutes'. By geologists and excavators, within this decade, a short span of six thousand years of man's existence was thrust back and back beyond so recent a 'creation' to a hundred thousand years, then, through Darwin, to a time infinitely more remote; though the proper evolutionary word for man is rather 'becoming' than 'beginning'.

Darwin looked also at his theory of evolution and it seemed to him that it rendered life the more noble: 'When I view all beings not as special creations, but as the lineal descendants of some few beings which lived long before the first bed of the Cambrian system was deposited' — which by modern reckoning would be more than five hundred million years ago — 'they seem to me', wrote Darwin, 'to become ennobled.'

Huxley, Darwin's bulldog, looked at man among the brutes, and thought that man now appeared all the more the 'Alps and Andes of the living world': intelligible and rational speech by which he accumulated and organized his experience, raised man, so Huxley proclaimed, far above his humble fellows; and on this eminence he was 'transfigured from his grosser nature by reflecting, here and there, a ray from the infinite source of truth'.

Also man, when he had walked a cold Europe so long ago with mammoth and wild horse, had not been utterly barbarous, which was another surprise. *Fat with akorns* — or with mammoth — 'at nature's early birth he might have *belcht his windy food*; but he had not been only a food-gatherer and a huntsman, only a fabricator of tools: into the bargain he had believed, so it now appeared, in a life after death; and he had been an artist — which brings us nearer to the tale of Creswell Crags in the eighteenth-seventies.

That palaeolithic man was an artist, who took art beyond the chipping of hatchets from flint, was first recognized in 1860 by a more than middle-aged Frenchman, Édouard Lartet, geologist, palaeontologist, and archaeologist, a lawyer by training and a magistrate, used to working out cases, weighing evidence, and reaching the certainties of a verdict. He had just investigated a cave-shelter, and then a cave, in the foothill country of the Pyrenees. The shelter (since destroyed by quarrying) was in the side of a hill near Aurignac, a small town in the Haute-Garonne. Lartet had arrived there in 1860, eight years after a roadman had broken into the shelter and discovered skeletons, all of which were piously reburied, by instructions of the mayor, in the Aurignac graveyard. But he found enough there still; he found bones of cave-bear, mammoth, bison, reindeer, rhinoceros, a few human bones, and an amulet, carved and perforated, made of a bear's tooth — enough to convince himself, after some doubt, that this shelter had been a burial place of Old Stone Age hunters. Today 'Aurignacian', from Aurignac, survives to designate the second of the chief 'cultures' into which archaeology now divides the final or upper portion of the Old Stone Age — the culture which embraces the first artists of mankind, or the first who are known to us with certainty.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These cultures, in sequence (see the second part of Chapter IV), are Châtelperronian, Aurignacian, Gravettian or Périgordian, Solutrean, and Magdalenian.



After this cave-shelter, the cave which Lartet also investigated, many miles to the south-east, by the town of Massat in Ariège, gave him in this same year less equivocal rewards. There were blackened hearths in the floor of the cave, there were implements of bone as well as flint — and there was an engraving. Here on a piece of antler was the scratched outline of the head of that animal which must so often have disputed homes with the men of the Old Stone Age — the cave-bear.

Much further north in Vienne, in a cave called Chaffaud, on the Charente, near Savigné, there had been found about twenty years before a small piece of reindeer bone engraved with two reindeer hinds, head to tail. No one guessed its origin or age. Lartet now saw that it was not Gaulish or 'Celtic': it was another huntsman's piece, another piece of the primeval art, no less than Lartet's engraving of a cave bear from the cave at Massat.

Here, then, was the Palaeolithic Artist — though the world was neither impressed nor convinced by Lartet's publication of the facts in 1861.

If others could doubt the date of the funeral ceremonies of the hill-side of Aurignac, burials were soon found which allowed no overwhelming scepticism.

In 1863 Édouard Lartet settled to digs and siftings and discoveries along the wriggling valley and between the black bulging cliffs of the Vézère. He found time, though, in the same year to go with Hugh Falconer, the palaeontologist who had been responsible for the start and the plan of Pengelly's investigations at Brixham, to the University Museum at Oxford, where he pondered the bones of the Red Lady and the mammoth ivories from Goat's Hole. At Les Eyzies, by the Vézère, his son Louis in 1868 excavated in the cliff the small cave or shelter of Cro-Magnon, which had filled to the roof in the course of many thousands of years. They were building the railway at that time from Périgueux down to the valley of the Dordogne, and needing an embankment, the constructors had removed many tons of ancient debris filling the angle just here between the cliff and the river. More of the debris was taken to repair a road. So the shelter was revealed, and then bones, flints, and two skulls. Lartet's son took charge. He uncovered hearths, bones, bone implements, worked flints, the tusk of a mammoth, and, far at the back,

bits and pieces of three more humans, making five in all, three men, and a woman with parts of the skeleton of her embryo. She had been killed in pregnancy, a hole in her skull above one eye showing where the spear had entered.

These men and the woman were Aurignacians as well. Sea-shells perforated for necklaces lay among the bones, and nearby was an oval pendant of mammoth ivory. Red ochre had stained the skull and the femur of one of the men. Louis Lartet's father at once recognized the likeness between these Cro-Magnon burials and the burial of the Red Lady.

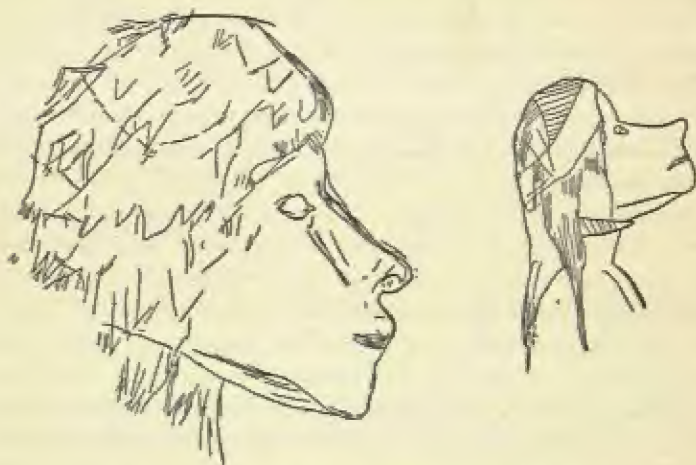
In 1872 a cave overlooking the Mediterranean between Mentone and Grimaldi gave up its dead, another palaeolithic skeleton as like as like in circumstances to Paviland's Red Lady. This ancient man lay as if asleep on his left side, his knees slightly bent, his hands raised towards his chin, his skull stained with red ochre, as if ochre had been packed round his corpse or painted on his bones to supply the blood of life for a continuation of life (prehistoric men were well supplied with red ochre, which is common in limestone as a waterborne replacement and deposit). Here, in this Grotta del Caviglione, were the sea-shells again, periwinkles bored with holes which the buried man seems to have worn as an anklet and in a chaplet around his head.

Here again were chipped flints, and bones of the extinct and by now familiar animals. Here palaeolithic shellfish-eaters and hunters had the sense to choose what must have been then (as it is now) one of the sunniest, warmest corners of the European coast. It is the winter coast of villas and bougainvillaea, of terraces of carnations and marguerites; and people bathe all the year round from the little stony beach below the cave (which is across the Italian border).

Before the year was out this Man of Mentone was in a glass case in the Natural History Museum in Paris, in the Jardin des Plantes, for the world to examine. And once again he was a find of the Age of Railways. Emile Rivière, the excavator, was able to get at him and at other skeletons he soon exhumed in caverns alongside, because the debris which half blocked the entrances had to be shifted, as the new railway crept forward between the blue sea and the tawny rocks, joining Nice to San Remo and Genoa and taking, below the seaside mountains, the old historic line of the Via Aurelia.



If the two engravings could be doubted — that bear's head and those reindeer hinds — Édouard Lartet and his rich English friend Henry Christy found enough, as they delved along the Vézère, to convince the last unbeliever. A letter in *The Times* is — or was — a passport to belief. Readers spread their *Times* one day in March, 1864, to find a letter about the excavations from Hugh Falconer;



*Magdalenian heads, from Grotte de la Marche*

Art, they now learned, began neither with Raphael nor even with Apelles, but in the caves and the shelters of the arrondissement of Sarlat, on the banks of the Vézère, many thousands of years before the first summer exhibition of the Royal Academy. Hugh Falconer told them how Monsieur Lartet and Mr Christy had found new engravings of animals in a cave at Les Eyzies, as well as carvings in reindeer horn at Laugerie Basse which, he affirmed, were 'marvels both of artistic design and of execution'.

In May, when the valley looked its greenest and happiest, Christy took a party of English experts around the excavations. They stayed a night at Montignac (little aware of the greater marvels of cave painting still awaiting their discoverer underneath the pines and the scrub overlooking the town); next day they floated down the black waters of the Vézère visiting site after site, at Le Moustier, La Madeleine, Laugerie Haute and Laugerie Basse and Les Eyzies, ready to

return as ambassadors of a new world of antiquity, in which, as one of them was to report, 'the works of Human Art' showed 'faculties of design beyond those of mere savages'.

Lartet in this same month of 1864 took Hugh Falconer to inspect the shelters along the river. They came to La Madeleine where he and Christy were still excavating (from this shelter comes the word 'Magdalenian', for the last of the Upper Palaeolithic cultures). At the very moment of their arrival the labourers picked out five pieces of a length of mammoth ivory. Lartet fixed the pieces together, noticing lines on the surface. The two friends bent their heads over it, and Falconer recognized a mammoth. They were looking at a picture — the first ever to be recovered — of a beast so long extinct, yet so long familiar from bones and skulls and tusks and teeth, and a very few incomplete carcasses frozen in Siberia; and it was drawn by an artist who knew the mammoth as well, for example, as Sir John Everett Millais (then busy on a picture of his small daughter asleep during the sermon) knew little girls in church or as Sir Edwin Landseer knew his Monarch of the Glen.

The Yakut and the Tungus of Siberia said that the mammoth was a creature which lived underground, unable to endure the surface of the world.

It had come to the surface. Here was the domed forehead, here were the tusks, the shaggy hair hanging from the flanks, the raised tail. Here was the first indubitable engraving or drawing of an animal indubitably extinct.

It was evidence indeed; evidence, in words of that letter Hugh Falconer had sent to *The Times*, which could no longer be 'disparaged by cursory observers and light reasoners'. This engraved elephant outweighed the rest of the finds of Lartet and Christy — though sheerly as art it might soon be surpassed by engravings from other palaeolithic sites, as it certainly was, for example, by the wonderful grazing reindeer described ten years later from a hunters' cave near Lake Constance, in the far north of Switzerland.

Pleasant to recall that Henry Christy, banker, businessman, traveller, friend of E. B. Tylor the first of modern anthropologists, had been inspired to his study of the infancy of mankind by all the artifacts of the modern world which the Great Exhibition of 1851 had summoned into the Crystal Palace. The clinching triumph in Pengelly's virgin cave at Brixham in 1858 had turned him from



travel in space to travel in time, and to his scrabbings along the Vézère (all of which Christy financed) side by side with the great Édouard Lartet.

Such was the extraordinary excitement of the years; and such was the position in 1875, when the Reverend Mr Mello and the youngish Mr Dawkins penetrated to the quietness, solitude, and aristocratically guarded beauty of Creswell Crags. Christy was now dead, Lartet was dead, after proclaiming, like heralds at an accession, Man who knew the Mammoth, Man who hunted so long ago, so near the glaciers of a newly demonstrated glacial epoch, as the Hunter Artist. But, alas, he had been the Hunter Artist — in *France*. This art had just been familiarized by the superb plates of a superb volume published in London and paid for by his family out of Christy's estate. But this undeniable if limited art, alas — was *French art*.

Caves had been cleared at home, in England, in Wales, caves in Glamorgan, in Yorkshire, in the Mendips, in Devon, men had lived in them, their tools, their weapons had been recovered, and the bones of the chase; was there no *English* cave art, after all?

The newest caves — these Derbyshire caves, this Robin Hood Cave among Creswell Crags — might now tell if England also was to have its glory. And who should be vehicle of the news if not Mr Dawkins, who was in the bosom of geology, and archaeology, in the direct succession; lecturer in geology, Fellow of the Royal Society, the Geological Society, and the Society of Antiquaries? Baroness Burdett-Coutts, richest and most formidable, most indefatigable and most intelligent of Victorian philanthropists, who concerned herself with everyone and everything from shoeblacks and stables for the donkeys of costermongers to the sciences and the plight of Turkish peasants and Australian aborigines, had been the friend and the pupil in geology of Dr Buckland; and at Buckland's Oxford she had endowed two scholarships for the encouragement of geological science. Dawkins had been the first of her scholars; and to the Baroness he had just dedicated his first book, his *Cave Hunting*, in which he brought Buckland's cavern researches of 1823 up to date. He had dug in caves himself, he had visited cave districts in France and French museums, had known Christy and Lartet. Now that the older men were dying off, Dawkins was establishing him-



self as King of the Cavern. Dawkins, if any one, should have his share in the discovery of the first English cave art.

The excavations began, delegated by the overlords, Dawkins and Mello, to a superintending museum curator from Derby, and by him to labourers. Blades of flint and flint scrapers and rough implements of quartzite were found, and bones and teeth. Here again were mammoth, bison, reindeer, wild horse, rhinoceros, hyena.

The overlords were not always present. But both were there one day in July, 1876. The labourers dug inside Robin Hood Cave by the small light of candles, when one of the two overlords, Parson Mello, observed that a small scrap of bone, in the cave-earth, seemed to bear engraved or scratched lines. It was carried beyond the black lip of rock and the extended branches of a yew which overhung the entrance of Robin Hood Cave into the daylight of the gorge; and there, to quote Mello, another geologist who was present with himself and Boytl Dawkins, 'at once noticed the rude picture of the forepart of a horse exactly similar to the palaeolithic figures that have been found in some of the continental caves. The value of this discovery, the first of its kind made in this country, need scarcely be insisted on'. England's glory was assured. Old Stone Age men at Creswell had been artists, no less than Old Stone Age men in the limestone gorges of the Vézère.

Yet why was this fragment of fossilized bone not grubby, brown, and damp, like the many thousands of other fragments of bone without engravings which were excavated? Why was it clean, white, and dry?

How was it that within four days in the same part of this same cave, at about the same level, Mr Dawkins 'in the same cave-earth, at the depth of about one foot . . . had the good fortune to see extracted, by a workman, a canine of *Machairodus latidens*, an animal whose remains, as all will be aware, have only twice before been found in England'?

*Machairodus* was an extinct sabre-toothed tiger which had belonged essentially to an earlier and warmer phase. Its long sword-shaped, saw-edged canines had been found unexpectedly in Kent's Hole at Torquay by Father MacEnery, and when excavations were continued there under a committee, it was the committee's earnest hope, disappointed year after year, that further remains of this

English *Machairodus* would be detected. And at last, at last, in 1872, William Pengelly, who superintended the workmen in Kent's Hole, announced that an incisor, a single front tooth of *Machairodus*, had been taken from the cave-earth.

Here, then, at Creswell Crags, in the cave-earth, in 1876, was another tooth. Here also was Mr Dawkins, in the right place at the right moment. The cave was lit only by two candles. 'Arrah!' said Boyd Dawkins boyishly, 'the *Machairodus*!', as the workmen revealed the tooth on a small escarpment of cave-earth. 'Oh, my!' said Boyd Dawkins, 'Pengelly will go wild when he hears of this! It will spread like wild-fire over Europe!' (Pengelly at this time was still excavating in Kent's Hole.)

The discoveries seemed too pat, the coincidence of the two finds within four days — four exceptional days in which Mello and Dawkins happened to be together at Creswell Crags — seemed too strong for others, among them Thomas Heath, the Curator of the Derby Museum who had actual charge of the excavations from day to day. Moreover the *Machairodus* tooth as well was clean, and white, and dry; when it should, he declared, have been grubby, brown and damp.

The finds were published in triumph, but the two overlords were pursued with disputation and innuendo, even into the publicity of letters in the *Manchester Guardian*. Dawkins declared that the tooth had been found underneath a layer, a seal, of stalagmite; Heath and others denied the stalagmite; and, said Heath, he had noticed, damn-ingly, in the cave-earth a polished channel above and below the tooth, apparently made with an iron bar or pick for inserting an object. The engraving was genuine Old Stone Age art, the tooth was genuine tiger tooth. Geologists in opposition now averred that teeth of several species of *Machairodus* were offered for sale by dealers abroad and in the United States.

Could *somebody* have obtained the engraving, probably from France (engraved bones from excavations in the Dordogne had multiplied since the time of Lartet and Christy), and could that same somebody have obtained the tiger's tooth and have planted both objects in the cave?

'Mr Dawkins seems to complain', Thomas Heath wrote of the fragment of *Machairodus*, 'that I do not specify who placed it there or from whence it was procured. I do not recognize it as part of my



duty to conjecture either.' He was a wise man. Yet his suspicions were reasonable, since both finds so neatly and so featly satisfied the desires, at that very time, of archaeology and palaeontology. Boyd Dawkins, for instance, was already committed by publication to the view that this great tiger had survived in England from a warmer to a colder phase. If evidence now placed these tigers where he expected them to be, and now produced Old Stone Age art out of the hat, or out of the cave, where he hoped it would be, was Dawkins to accept or criticize, to be ready or to be sceptical? He was too ready; and both men, both Parson Mello and Mr Dawkins, rode out the storm with an ill-grace and lame replies. Since then, and since the affair of the forged Piltdown Skull, this tooth of the Robin Hood Cave has been scrubbed, it is true, a little clean of old doubts and difficulties. *Machairodus* teeth from French and Italian sites and English caves — including the tooth from Robin Hood Cave — have been compared for their content of fluorine, nitrogen, and uranium, leading to a fair certainty that the tooth did not come from deposits more appropriate to such tigers in France or Italy; to a likelihood that it was of the same period as other undisputed bones in the cave and to a provisional conclusion that these great tigers with teeth like pruning hooks did, as Dawkins maintained, survive in England, if not elsewhere, until the time of Upper Palaeolithic man. Still the old possibility that it had been planted was not entirely expunged; it *could* have been transplanted from another similar cave deposit which would have ensured a similar content of fluorine and uranium.

As for the engraved horse of Robin Hood Cave — there it lies still in the British Museum with an honour it hardly deserves, either for itself, since it is a poor skimpy piece of drawing, or for its provenance, since it is cleared by no means of doubts and difficulties. Indeed there were later voices, though Boyd Dawkins, able geologist, archaeologist, and scholar and veteran still protested with vigour, to say roundly and with no equivocation at all that the horse *had* indeed been planted.<sup>1</sup>

Such was the sad and bad little tale of the first claim that 'England' had also known its hunter artists of the Old Stone Age.

<sup>1</sup> In his *Ancient Hunters* in 1914, W. J. Sollas spoke of the engraving as a 'forgery' (though in itself it may have been genuine) 'introduced into the cave by a mischievous person'.



Oddly, almost at the same time as these events, a step was taken elsewhere which was to make engraved or carved bones seem like ornamented umbrella handles to a Tintoretto. One day in 1875, in the limestone country of northern Spain, within the limits of the township of Santillana del Mar, the cave of Juan Mortero on the farm called Altamira, was entered for the first time by an inquisitive antiquary of the neighbourhood, Don Marcelino de Sautuola. He noticed, as he looked for bones, flints, and signs of occupation, some black drawing on the rock. It was not very distinct and he gave it little attention. In 1879 this local savant came once more to the cave, to excavate, and it was then that his very small daughter with her cry out of the gloom of 'Toros!' — 'Bulls!' — began a new era of controversy and discovery.

A yard or two further inside the cave, where the low roof made the passage easier for a child than a man, she had seen by the candle she held, the luminous lively red paintings of the huntsmen.

### III

## The Wye to the Vézère

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BEFORE WE GO ON to the painted caves of France or Spain (for which May, in a limestone country, or early June, is the most delightful of times, as Henry Christy's Englishmen found in 1864), has poor England or poor Wales nothing else to show, nothing else to suggest the nature of a primeval civilization?

Scotland is out, since the glaciers covered it. Yet remember that England and the rest of Europe were still joined during these long cultural epochs of the age of ice (and were to remain joined until a much later time, between 7000 and 6000 B.C.). So hunters, wanderers, the restless, the pushed out, could come and go. Indeed there had been man in Britain for many of the half million or so years of mankind's history as a maker of tools.

Through the Ice Age, glaciers advanced, retreated, and advanced, before a final retreat towards the modern Arctic which was under way some twenty thousand years ago. At their worst — we are now back some quarter of a million years — the glaciers left only southern England free of ice. The last glaciation at its most severe covered the greater part of Wales and the northern counties and East Anglia. Yet several of the Welsh and English caves had their occupants before Aurignacians and their successors belatedly visited this edge of Europe. At Creswell Crags, for instance, Robin Hood Cave and the Pin Hole and Church Hole and Mother Grundy's Parlour had for their earlier inhabitants men who fashioned the rougher implements of quartzite, the roughly chipped pebble implements, which occurred in the lower level of the cave-earth. These earlier troglodytes may have been some of those men first recognized abroad in the beetling skull-cap of the Neanderthal cavern. Neanderthal Man was a stooping, slouching by-blow on the human pedigree who had lived in Europe and elsewhere long before the first Upper Palaeolithic huntsmen and artists began to enter from the east more than eighty thousand years ago. He survived here, in England and in Wales, later than abroad, pushed out perhaps by the newcomers

to France and the West into a colder, less welcoming, less desirable country near the edge of northern ice, the glaciers in his English heyday leaving the south, and much of the Midlands, free for beast and hunter.

There were few enough, no doubt, of these trolls or troll-men, but one site seems to have been theirs particularly — a particular home for them in the intervals of their cold wanderings after game and food. If you are on your way from London to Lascaux by car you will sweep past it as you descend the chalk escarpment along the road to Folkestone and Dover. The escarpment gives a vast green view over the Kentish woods of Seal Chart and Ightham and Mere-worth. A darker patch in the green marks Oldbury, a small plateau of foxgloves, whortleberry, heather, bracken, and pines once fortified by the Belgæ in the Iron Age (in a mere yesterday, against the palaeolithic scale of time). The foxgloves seemed strange to me when I first clambered on to Oldbury out of a deep lane. I was after cave-shelters; and the shelters of the Old Stone Age are usually in limestone, which foxgloves eschew decidedly. On top I passed a small mere, drained by a stream called the Waterflash, which is black enough and smelly enough for a troll. These palaeolithic trolls, these Neanderthaloid men, lived in fact, not under the mere, like Grendel and his mother in the tale of Beowulf, but on the eastern fall, the eastern scarp of the Oldbury plateau, in sandy half-caves which were roofed with a cap of a hard green 'Oldbury Stone'.

Only one shelter remains, since road engineers liked this tough stone and quarried it along the whole eastern length of the hill — to furnish a new macadamized surface for the Edgware Road in London. Initials, names, and dates are carved on what is left of this one shelter. Look down through the pines. Immediately below, you see the newest of suburban chimneys. Shift your gaze over the chimneys, and you see beyond the pines a wide landscape; you lose yourself in this wide landscape which appears neither modern nor tame nor comfortable, suggesting desolation and enormousness and the chilly discomforts of the last glaciation, when the Neanderthaloid families sat under the brows of the Oldbury Stone, enjoying as much sun as they could get. Along this rim, above these chimneys, and the traffic of a main road and this landscape, enough flint scrapers, cleavers, and axes have been excavated to suggest a small factory.



Knowledge of the tools of these troll-men, who were unable to survive a new inrush or infiltration into Europe of a better-equipped *Homo sapiens*, goes back to 1863, to the Vézère. It was in the scarp of clean limestone above the Vézère, behind the village of Le Moustier, that Édouard Lartet and Henry Christy had dug down to coarse hand-axes and scrapers and cleavers or choppers which argued a different culture, argued different men, not the ones who fashioned the more delicate flint knives and flakes of other shelters such as La Madeleine. And with these flints there were no bones or antlers carved and ornamented and cut into tools. Seven years earlier the beetling skull-cap of Neanderthal had come to light. During the next half century or so, in caves in Belgium, Croatia, and France, such skulls and such rougher implements were found in association, and from Le Moustier the culture of the Neanderthaloids came to be called 'Mousterian'. The tools from Oldbury and the tools from Le Moustier are much alike.

There is a book on the history of the races of men in which Neanderthal Man, accurately reconstructed from his skulls, is pictured clean-shaven and wearing a trilby. It is clear, though he stooped, though he slouched, that in a crowd or on a bus one would hardly give him a second look. So 'troll' is perhaps an unfair description. If he was no artist, he was, after all, a huntsman skilful enough to deal with bison, rhinoceros, and mammoth, handy with his stone tools and weapons which, if rather coarse, were not so ill-devised. He believed perhaps in a life after death; and for all his gait, his projecting brow and his sloping forehead, he was not in a thorough sense less of a *man*, less gifted with intellectual power than those who succeeded him in the rest of Europe and at last in our own century, even if the way he lived was neither so elaborate nor so full of possibilities.

In England and Wales his presence has to be deduced from his implements. No bones have been found, no skulls. Yet implements indicate that Neanderthaloids frequented Kent's Hole at Torquay and Goat's Hole in the Gower, as well as Oldbury and Creswell Crags. They hunted, also, around the Vale of Clwyd in North Wales and round the Mendip Hills in Somerset, where they used the Hyena Den alongside the draughtier great cave of Wookey Hole, from which the Axe pours out of this hump of limestone hills into Sedgemoor.

The Mendips, though, belong more to the supplanters of Neanderthal Man; they are more the property of *Homo sapiens*, upright in stance, more ingenious, more inventive, now pushing his way in from Asia. Of these Upper Palaeolithic intruders, a few Aurignacians wandered into England, and into Wales, where the young man of Paviland found his resting-place; but it was not so much Aurignacians as Gravettians who evolved rather a poor yet distinctive mode of existence up here so far to the north-west. They were a later wave of immigrants from east to west, and it was later still that a few of them penetrated to the Welsh and English hunting-grounds. 'Creswellian' is now the name which dignifies their local form of Gravettian Culture. The late time in which these Creswellian-Gravettians flourished, if you can say 'flourished' of such a life, coincided with the age in France of the great Magdalenian painters and reindeer hunters, the crowning, consolidated, most creative age of the Upper Palaeolithic.

In the Mendips, as elsewhere, palaeolithic huntsmen were buried ceremonially in caves which the hunting families or parties used from time to time. From grubby Aveline's Hole, a cave beside the road in Burrington Combe, ten such burials, ten skeletons, have been extracted. In crowded, commercialized Gough's Cave at Cheddar, in which the guide taps *Annie Laurie* on the stalactites, they have exhumed the 'Cheddar Man', now displayed at the entrance, as well as two of the antler 'sceptres', hundreds of which have been found in the Dordogne — though in France they were carved with more skill and energy. In both caves, the excavators came upon those pierced winkle shells which the hunters liked and which link their burials and their cave sojourns across England and Wales. These are the same little Dwarf Winkles we still pick up on every beach, so pretty and so various, plain or banded, yellow, orange, or green, dark red or purple, or almost black. They were in Goat's Hole with the Red Lady, they were at Creswell Crags, in the Pin Hole. Abroad Old Stone Age men preferred the larger periwinkles, which lay among the bones in Louis Lartet's shelter of Cro-Magnon, also, it will be remembered, with a skeleton of the red-ochred Man of Mentone. A 'harpoon' from Aveline's Hole, and 'harpoons' from Kent's Hole in Devon, also tell of expert reindeer hunters towards the end of the Upper Palaeolithic, for these harpoons (it is a misleading



name) are in fact many-barbed spearheads fashioned from the antlers of the very animal they were to be used against.

For seeing Burrington Combe or the Cheddar Gorge, palaeolithically, the only correct time would be on a frosty, pallid, brief, uncomfortable February afternoon, when the Combe and the long grey gorge are deserted. Yet if I were to choose one palaeolithic cave to visit in Britain other than the caves of the Gower, it would not be in the Mendips. I would be tempted — no more than tempted — up to North Wales to a little canyon of limestone which runs up from the Vale of Clwyd, among the 'azurous hung hills', 'very-violet-sweet', of Gerard Manley Hopkins, who wrote his major poems nearby:

*Lovely the woods, waters, meadows, combes, vales,  
All the air things wear that build this world of Wales.*

Cae Gwyn Cave in this canyon speaks more than others of retreating, then advancing, ice, and then again melting ice. When it was excavated, a second entrance was revealed below clay and ice-polished, ice-scratched boulders mainly from Snowdon, which heaves itself up away to the west of the Vale. There were bones of tundra animals from mammoth to reindeer below the filling. But there were also a few flints of a palaeolithic kind to show that men had been here in this cave before an ice-sheet had flowed overhead, and deposited its bottom load of boulders and clay.

This Cae Gwyn has its drama. Yet my one cavern would be King Arthur's Cave, in an altogether mightier canyon, three hundred feet above the Wye. It is on that side of the Wye which used to be Wales, beyond the glumness of the Forest of Dean and the Dean coal measures and sandstones from under which the limestone emerges. A lane wriggles up from the road which joins two decayed towns of the cultural charm of the Picturesque, Ross and Monmouth. It climbs the hill of Great Doward, to a limestone plateau which reminds one of stony uplands in the cave districts of France or Spain. Isolated cottages hide in a scrub of ash trees, beeches, wild madder, butterfly orchids, and blue columbine. Quarries are driven into limestone still raw, still pink, yellow, white, under the beech trees. Stone is crushed, and a stony powder whitens the foliage.

Past such a raw quarry, a side lane, or a track, dives downward; it is walled on one side by an old grey escarpment of limestone, hung



with ivy, interrupted here and there by a shallow cave. The soil, ploughed up across a basin of fields on the other side of the track, glows deeply in the sunshine with the orange-ochre typical of limestone country. Everything is clean, is clear and suggestive. And below trees, just where the escarpment rises and then gives out, you come upon King Arthur's Cave. A notice warns you not to damage, deface, or defile a monument of antiquity. Two natural doorways of darkness pierce the rock. One gives access to a brief two branches of a cave, the other (together with an extra, smaller, rounder entrance, some way along the escarpment) to a domed hall, which appears, in the murkiness inside, almost circular. Excavators have scooped out the floor of the hall to a depth of several feet. There are signs of excavation in the floor of the branching cave and in the terrace outside under beech, hazel, and ash.

But that is all. Excavations have sifted out nothing but a few Creswellian odds and ends. Light a carbide lamp, and grub around the domed hall or the branching cave, and nothing tells you that man came here twenty thousand, or thirty thousand, years ago: there is not a scratch on the rock, not a line, not a speck, not a trace of red ochre. This cave is not so important, archaeologically, as the Pin Hole, Aveline's Hole, Kent's Hole, or Gough's Cave. But here you foretaste — and how nobly — the river gorges of the Vézère, the Célé, the Lot, the Anglin. Walk on from the cave: you will have discovered by now that you are in a little side-valley of the gorge of the Wye, at right angles to its run. Walk a little further down under the trees, and you reach a platform. The side-valley has come to an end, and there is the Wye, sliding so narrowly and so far below; sliding and dividing around a small island of tufted trees which catch the light.

From where you stand it is two hundred and fifty feet down to this dark thread of river, by an abrupt yet wooded descent no longer of limestone but of Old Red Sandstone (so there are fox-gloves about under the trees). Admirable in itself, here in this gorge below this King Arthur's Cave, you foretaste that metropolitan country of the art of the Old Stone Age in which wild horses were stampeded over cliffs and salmon were speared, and caves were painted, and engravings were cut upon bone or antler with little gravers of flint, in sunshine, upon the terrace of cave or half-cave.

Yet in England and Wales there are no painted animals — no bison, mammoths, oxen, horses, red deer, or reindeer painted on the walls. No horses, no bison are carved in relief upon the rock or engraved upon smooth surfaces of limestone. No find from any cave in England and Wales gives a notion of Upper Palaeolithic skill in carving small objects, or scratching the likeness of animals upon bone or antler or stone slab. Our few meagre engravings or drawings — apart from the planted wild horse of Creswell Crags — scarcely fill a cigar-box. In King Arthur's Cave thirty years ago they discovered a length of bone, oval, polished, bevelled and engraved with what may or may not be the conventional image of a fish. It was perhaps the head of a fish-spear, which would have been appropriate to the salmon river running so deeply below the cave. The slur on Creswell Crags was a little redeemed when excavators in the Pin Hole in 1925 found a similar spearhead scratched with two conventionalized images of fish, and next, on Easter Sunday in 1928, when they found a bone, more than three inches below a six-inch layer of stalagmite this time, on which was engraved a tiny ithyphallic man — he has his counterparts in France and Spain — masked with an animal's head.

One cavern, it is true, may exhibit a very few markings in red ochre which are perhaps Aurignacian. It is in the Gower. In 1912 when Professor Sollas of Oxford reinvestigated the Goat's Hole and recognized the nature and period and sex of Dean Buckland's Red Lady, he looked into other caves, including one in the sea cliff nearer Swansea. By this time many of the surprises of cave painting in France and Spain had been discovered, published, and accepted; and in this Bacon's Hole, in a dark chamber to the side, Sollas noticed ten bars of red arranged horizontally on the rock. He had with him the Abbé Breuil, most acute and persistent of French explorers. They observed that the marks were covered by a thin glaze of stalagmite; and Breuil likened them to seven red bars he had seen in the painted cave of Font-de-Gaume. (Plate facing page 48.)

Perhaps it is worth an expedition to examine what may, after all, be the only cave painting of the Old Stone Age in Great Britain, to observe, at any rate, the divorce between suburban Gower on the cliff-top, in the heyday of the culture of cold ham and salad, and this cave all by itself in a different environment of grey rock and fretted grey breccia and Sea Lavender and vivid squads of Golden Samphire.



Most of an iron grill protecting the chamber of the red bars has rusted away. 'Mary' and 'Doris' have written their names, in 1954, in pencil, across the bars, some of which are partly obliterated by candle smoke. Since 1912 the bars are said to have changed shape and number. I am not so sure. There are still ten, so far as I can see, and if the shapes seem to have changed it may be because they were not pictured so accurately by their discoverer. Small blame, since these ten bars would be difficult to trace or photograph. Also the stalagmite covering may have darkened. I believe myself they were drawn parallel and horizontal across the cave wall by a human hand — which would still not prove that the hand was Aurignacian. And ten red smears hardly make a masterpiece of cave painting.

To tell the truth the ice-free portion of Britain in these ancient times was out on a limb, on the cultural edge of Asia and Europe. In the long, the very long space of centuries, a few hunting parties would have come and gone; and the few tribes who stayed and settled must have become the provincials of Europe. There was an Aurignacian element. Gravettians crossed the lands of the North Sea from the vast culture-extent of Central Europe and Russia. Britain had 'Proto-Solutreans' from France or Central Europe; and there were feeble contacts with France. But those who stayed were closer to the cold limits of the ice, exposed to stormier winds, briefer summers, dirtier conditions.

Food was more difficult to come by, game was not so prodigally abundant. Life had few settled areas. Of all British caves in which evidence of habitation has been detected, up to now, two and two only, Goat's Hole in a more or less cosy position near the sea, above land where there is now only the Bristol Channel and below a park land of wild horses, bison, and reindeer, and the Pin Hole at Creswell Crags, were used and used again over long periods.

Arguing from the cave evidence and partly from the native population which sprinkled Alaska in 1867 and the North-west Territories of Canada in 1911, the archaeologist Grahame Clark thinks that in England and Wales there could scarcely have been a maximum population, in summer, of two thousand. In winter the resident population was probably down to two hundred and fifty, by his estimate. So a tiny population enjoyed neither plenty nor that leisure which comes from plenty, in which man can make more of his arts and ceremonies.



Ceremonies, no doubt, there were. You might, no doubt, have seen men dancing in hunting or food-collecting magic, women perhaps in love magic, on bare ground near the sombre rocks of Creswell or the Wye, the Mendips, the Gower, or Torquay. They would have painted themselves, perhaps, in white clay and red ochre and charcoal from their fires, they would have greased themselves until their skins glistened, they would have danced and danced in a corroboree in the brief sunshine.

But to expect in English or Welsh caves behind these dancers a rich cave art would be like expecting an art as accomplished and pure as Giotto's on the wall of an English medieval church or expecting a Picasso painting in a Canadian farmhouse.

In Australia the modern cave art of the Old Stone Age aborigines does not depend only upon an abundance of caves and shelters of the right kind. It depends on population and livelihood — in Northern Kimberley and Arnhem Land where the art of the caves is especially concentrated, there are enough people, and the people have enough food, so their lives are not too much given to wandering, and searching. The artists among them have inclination, time, and opportunity, as they had in the France and Spain of upper palaeolithic cultures.

## IV

# Archaeologists and Artists

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SPAIN AND SANTANDER and the cave of Juan Mortero, where Don Marcelino de Sautuola had seen the huge bisons in red and black in 1879, were a long way off. Whatever else had been gleaned, however far the human horizon had now been pushed back, the idea that man of the Old Stone Age went to work with paints like Raphael, like Ingres, or like Sir Frederick Leighton, for example, newly knighted and newly elected President of the Royal Academy, would have appeared insupportable in the eighteen-seventies. For one thing Europe had reached a state of high aesthetic and cultural self-satisfaction. The Masters stretched back in a row, the national galleries were established; and if the Impressionists were little regarded, each country had its new prophets of Art and Loftiness, blown up with an air, and with a conceit, which were more than personal. Germans who admired Böcklin, Frenchmen who swooned before Puvis de Chavannes, Englishmen who looked for ethical beauty in Watts, classical beauty in Leighton, the aesthetic ideal in Burne-Jones, also felt that the art of painting was no less subject to progress and perfectability than Man himself.

In such artists it had progressed, had perhaps reached the perfect. 'I want to make art', said Watts, 'the servant of Religion by stimulating thought high and noble. I want to assert for art a yet higher place than it has hitherto had.' Artists — if they were successful — lived and painted in palaces or temples of ideal beauty. In Leighton House, in Holland Park in London, Leighton lived among marbles, alabaster, and Persian tiles. A fountain played upon rare golden fishes sent by special order from Japan. Light filtered on to him through screens from Cairo. A cast of a frieze of the Parthenon ran along the wall of his large, clean studio, from which a door led into a balcony from the art-city of Venice. Pictures surrounded him, by Tintoretto, Schiavone, Constable, Corot, Delacroix, Watts, Burne-Jones, Alma Tadema, Millais. Here in grandeur, in his velvet coat, he would receive the dealers from Bond Street, the intermediaries



between art and ironmasters and stockbrokers and aldermen, wave his white hand at the pictures he cared to sell (on which the prices were marked), wish them good morning and leave them to squabble among themselves, and ring the bell for Art's man-servant (himself was Art) when they had decided which dealer would part with cheques for what.

Could a primeval savage be equated with such a priest and prophet of Art, such a Titan or Olympian? Could there be anything in common between the studio, and the Parthenon frieze, in this Temple of Art and Lofty Thoughts, and a dirty cave in a hillside in Spain?

Spain was a long way off. If carved objects or engraved drawings of animals could be brought to Paris or London (and in London the British Museum had very quickly purchased some of these movable works of art, excavated in 1863 by rivals to Lartet and Christy from a cave at Bruniquel in Tarn-et-Garonne and purchased by the Museum in 1864, after the French Government had refused to buy them), paintings on walls of rock could only stay where they were painted.

When Hugh Falconer had written to *The Times* in 1864 and informed the English world of works of art by 'primeval man' or when Lartet and Christy had made their own report in the same year to a learned journal, their claims had been subject to a discount. They were archaeologists. Archaeologists might talk about 'marvels of artistic design and execution' or about the revelation of 'faculties of design beyond those of mere savages'. But how could such small carvings, such small anonymous engravings on dirty scraps of fossilized ivory or fossilized bone, challenge Academy or Salon exhibits in white marble or lapped inside large gilded frames? Falconer had told readers of *The Times*, Lartet and Christy had told a more learned audience, in some detail, of the existence of men who had lived or sheltered in caves, fed coarsely on fish, flesh and fowl, cracked bones for marrow, and stitched clothes of hide and fur with thread of reindeer sinew and needles of reindeer bones. Art objects or no, weren't these men savages, after all? And were not living savages as well endowed with an elementary taste for the arts of carving, engraving, and design?

When sixteen years later, in 1880, a Spanish gentleman of no particular fame or intellectual eminence claimed, in a pamphlet printed in far-off Santander, that proper paintings in red and in



black, in a cave no one else had visited or heard of, were the work of these remote savages, what else could be expected than scepticism and disregard? They were natural enough. He might as well have claimed that each bison on the roof of Altamira was enclosed in a primeval gilt frame, bore a catalogue number or a red spot to indicate a sale. More than twenty years went by before the ancientness of the paintings was generally acknowledged; which is soon enough, considering that only twenty years before had the world been convinced, beyond cavil, of the antiquity of man.

Don Marcelino de Sautuola modestly called his pamphlet *Brief Notes on some Prehistoric Objects of the Province of Santander*. He was a patriot for his own province, he had seen engraved bones, engraved palaeolithic tools, at the Paris Exhibition in 1878, and so looked around him in the caves of his own countryside, visiting again this unexplored cavern of Altamira, which someone out shooting had hit upon in 1868 after a fall of earth and rock. Very briefly in his few pages he described the animals on the ceiling of the first large chamber not far from daylight. There were the 'bulls' which seemed like bison, there was a hind, and a horse's head, and two wild boars. He noted how skilfully they were painted, how cunningly the painter had used bosses of projecting limestone, and made a merit of the unevenness of the roof. He noticed the firmness and assurance of the painter's design. His excavations at the mouth of the cave in what the archaeologists still called a *kjökkenmødding*<sup>1</sup> — a kitchen midden, in other words, or rubbish heap of compacted bones and shells — suggested an Old Stone Age date, and he argued that if there were, as everyone now admitted, engravings of Old Stone Age animals on bone and ivory, there could equally and without cavil be paintings upon rock; which was sense.

To add to his arguments he had some of the paintings drawn *in situ* and lithographed, and he now reproduced them in his pamphlet.

The way in which archaeologists reacted recalls the processes of mind of Dr Buckland believing in a percentage of the Book of Genesis and faced by the bones of his Red Lady and the bones of antediluvian animals. The bones of beast were ancient, the bones

<sup>1</sup> This romantic-looking word is Danish. Archaeologists, Danish, English, French, had argued zealously about the date of the first middens to be noticed and investigated — New Stone Age middens on the Danish Coast.



ABOVE. Creswell Crags, on the border of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire.

BELOW. Bacon Hole, in the cliffs of Gower.





ABOVE. Grotte de la Mouthe: palaeolithic hut. BELOW. Farmer's hut near La Mouthe.



of man, or lady, were not. The objects excavated from the floor of Altamira were ancient, archaeologists agreed, the paintings were not. Journalists came to the paintings, the public came, Alfonso XII came, one of his entourage inscribing the royal name on the painted ceiling in candle smoke. Archaeologists stayed away, except for two — a professor of geology and palaeontology from Madrid who stuck obstinately to his conviction, no less strong than Don Marcelino's, that the paintings were palaeolithic and genuine, and a palaeontologist and engineer from France who was no less certain that the paintings were modern and faked. The paintings, this Édouard Harlé admitted, were not without skill: only a master could have drawn the hind's head. Yet the paintings were recent, were very recent; they had been made, concluded Harlé in the best of faith, between Don Marcelino's first visit in 1875 and that visit in 1879 when his daughter exclaimed at the sight of the coloured 'bulls'.

Some animals were indeed glazed with stalagmite. Others, though, had been painted on top of incrustations, on top of small stalactites. Don Marcelino was not accused; but after all, an artist, a draughtsman, had come out with him from Santander to make the drawing which was lithographed for *Brief Notes*; and after all, he might have been duped. Personal factors of this kind are soon buried, but to this capable and brisk railway engineer Don Marcelino might have seemed a credulous character, easily taken in. By no means the best lawyer for his own case, Don Marcelino may have seemed ignorant or ineffectual. He may have been fussy, or aloof, or shy, or disinclined to argue. He was certainly modest, he was certainly no fighter for his view. Vis-à-vis an expert, he was placed like that gentle amateur Father MacEnery at odds over Kent's Hole with the authority, force, and experience and brisk geniality of Dr Buckland.

Édouard Harlé was neither fool nor conspicuous time-server. He saw the animals on the roof were 'natural', they were like the originals, they were not crude or distorted images — indeed they were far more natural and like, far less crude and distorted, than the beasts, shall we say, painted along the margins of an illuminated manuscript or carved on the corbels and the pillars of a Romanesque cathedral. Archaeologists are seldom well up in matters of art. Yet if he was no connoisseur, Harlé may well have thought of beasts stalking through paintings in the Salon, of the animals of popular Rosa Bonheur or Troyon, or even of Delacroix. The sculptured

animals of Barye may have come into his mind. Here as well, in the cave he had travelled to see, were animals executed in a recognizable, sophisticated way, presumably modern in consequence. The coloured contours in the damp air of Northern Spain looked so fresh that a vast age, even a considerable age, seemed out of the question. And forgeries (though of a different order from the little affair of Creswell Crags or the stupendous hoax of the Piltdown Skull) were not unknown, by any means. At Abbeville Boucher de Perthes had long ago been victimized by the insertion of human bones and forged hand-axes into one of his gravel-pits. When they were excavating the famous Kesslerloch in Switzerland in 1874, one of the helpers made drawings on bone and planted them in the cave.

Moreover, this cautious Harlé was French; and the experts who never came near the cave, but accepted Harlé's careful report and his impossible yet convenient condemnation, were also French, and human. They liked to think of the Dordogne — of the limestone cliffs of the Vézère above Les Eyzies — as the Capital of the Old Stone Age. If these paintings at Altamira were genuine, were actually as ancient as Don Marcelino claimed, the Capital, and with it the interest of the world, would shift abruptly from Les Eyzies to Altamira, from France to Spain. So the paintings were best forgotten, dismissed, or smeared with doubt. As for the rest of the world, they had not seen the paintings, they had not seen the pamphlet, they had not examined the arguments or the lithographs; and if they had done all of these things, the Altamira paintings, so natural, so forceful, so fresh, would even then (if their antiquity had been allowed) have topsy-turvied the progress and betterment and perfectability of Fine Art and Civilization.

One artist did go to the cave. This was a Spaniard from Torrelavega, a few miles away, named Eugenio Lemus y Olmo, a parasite on the Old Masters who won third-class medals at large exhibitions for engravings after Zurbarán, Velazquez, and Titian, and would have pictured Art or Artist, one supposes, in terms of Leighton in Leighton House or of Mariano Fortuny, the fashionable Spanish painter of the day who had 'surrounded himself in his studio with costly arms, rich stuffs and tapestries, bronzes and faïences, carpets and rugs from the East, fresh flowers, and copies of the works of his favourite masters' — but certainly not in terms of a grubby cavern and winkle shells and dead bison and chipped flints. Strengthened by



Harlé's report, Lemus went further and allowed the paintings next to no merit: they had been copied from prints by a second-rate student of the modern school, he said.

All the circumstances conspired to blindness or indifference. So did fixed ideas about the nature of art (from which Don Marcelino was free, as an amateur in archaeology who was also no artist). The situation is common enough, working pro or con, with the fake or against the genuine. White South Africans feeling superior to black ones could not accept the Bantu origin of the huge 'citadel' at Zimbabwe. Scandinavian Americans like to accept the very evident forgery of the Kensington Rune Stone, found in 1898 in Minnesota (on a Norwegian settler's farm), since it argues a Scandinavian pre-Columbian discovery of America. Art historians, postulating just such early pictures by Vermeer, believed in Van Meegeren's *Journey to Emmaus*, though this forged Vermeer was atrocious in paint, atrocious in drawing, atrocious in sentiment. English experts long accepted the forged Piltdown skull-top and jawbone partly because the discovery was English and partly because in 1912 a place was ready in the archaeological mind for discovering a 'dawn man', who should link *Homo sapiens* to an even more ancient and a more apish being.

When the polychromes of Altamira were dismissed, cave paintings ascribed to the Bushmen in South Africa had long been known and cave paintings of the Australians in red ochre had been described and pictured by Sir George Grey as far back as 1841. Yet few minds would or could make the necessary leap. When Don Marcelino died, unrepentant, in 1888, only one archaeologist of the first rank had accepted his paintings and agreed with the date he assigned to them. Indeed, Don Marcelino was only vindicated, his cave only visited, his bison and other creatures only copied and published, after other paintings and engravings on cave walls had been found and accepted by Frenchmen — in France.

If one sticks conscientiously to dates, Altamira was not the first cave on the surfaces of which Upper Palaeolithic images were recognized, for in 1878, a year earlier, a schoolmaster had noticed and had even photographed some engravings in the Grotte de Chabot in the commune of Aiguèze, in Gard, down towards the Mediterranean; but they were in a difficult cave which could only be reached by boat along the river canyon of the Ardèche, and they were by no means clear.



The deciding event came in 1894, six years after the death of Don Marcelino de Sautuola. There was a small cave on a farm just above Les Eyzies and the Vézère, which the farmer, whose house was two or three hundred yards away, planned to turn into a tool shed and potato-cellar. At this time it was no more than a half-cave or shelter under a brow of rock. Before building a wall across the opening, he dug back the earth and levelled off the floor, throwing out bones and flints, and so uncovered a small hole at the back. Boys crawled in, wriggled a hundred yards or so down a passage, and noticed engravings of animals on one side and on the roof. Word was sent to Emile Rivière, who had unearthed the Man of Mentone twenty-two years before. Rivière came early in 1895 and gradually cleared this cave of La Mouthe (the name of the little hamlet nearby), recognizing more engravings and a few paintings as well. It was to be decisive, yet this was not Brixham repeated. Pengelly's virgin cave at Brixham had clinched the ancientness of man, Rivière's more or less virgin cave at La Mouthe should at once have clinched the ancientness of cave art. It did so in the end. But here the discoveries were not carefully and independently controlled. Though the cave and the art had been sealed by Magdalenian deposits, there could still be, indeed there was, scepticism. Yet Altamira was now remembered; and to some, at a distance — all the distance between France and Spain — its paintings began to appear less doubtful.

One discovery led to another. Knowing about Rivière's animals in La Mouthe, an archaeologist looked again at some faint lines on the wall of the cave of Pair-non-Pair, near the mouth of the Dordogne river, which he had long been excavating. Rather than scrape the soft wall, he washed it off with a vine spray and made out the figure of a horse, then several more engraved animals, and a few red lines emphasizing animal contours. This was in 1896. In 1897 La Mouthe also led to the recognition of painting in the slit-cave of Marsoulas, in a new district down by the Pyrenees. In 1901 excitement shifted back again to the now classic Les Eyzies. Ibex, horse, lion, mammoth, oxen, deer and reindeer, rhinoceros, and man were detected on the walls of a cave in the small limestone dene of Les Combarelles, up the road from Les Eyzies — engravings, for the most part; and off the same road, just off the same valley of the Beune, four days later, the schoolmaster from Les Eyzies found himself face to face with paintings as he squeezed sideways like a crab

into the cavern of Font-de-Gaume. The cave was shown at once to his friends Henri Breuil and Louis Capitan, fresh from Les Combarelles; and going deeper into the cave these young men saw, with excitement, bison, mammoth, horses, reindeer, painted in red and brown and black.

The light broke. Among others, it broke now upon Emile Carthailac of Toulouse, one of the elder archaeologists who had refused so long ago to agree to the genuineness of the paintings of Altamira. He had visited Pair-non-Pair, he had crawled two days after into La Mouthe, and now he had read the first accounts of Font-de-Gaume and Les Combarelles, after which this elderly and courageous scholar acknowledged his mistake, publicly, in a recantation he named the *Mea Culpa of a Sceptic*. In La Mouthe he had with his own hand cleared the cave earth from the foot of one of the animals engraved on the wall, he had recognized the identity in style of the cave engravings and the engravings on bone. 'I am party', he wrote, 'to a mistake of twenty years' standing, to an injustice which must be frankly admitted and put right.'

And poor Altamira, which he had never seen, and had so sceptically and so persistently condemned? 'Useless to dwell on the impressions I had when I saw M. de Sautuola's drawings,' wrote the sceptic now self-condemned. 'Here was something absolutely new, strange in every possible way. I took counsel. An influence which had often had happier results very quickly made me sceptical. *Take care!*, someone wrote to me, *They want to play tricks with French prehistorians! Don't trust these priest-ridden Spaniards!* And I didn't trust them!'

If he had not yet seen Les Combarelles or Font-de-Gaume, the first accounts of them were convincing. He trusted his younger archaeological colleagues — and 'as a result of all they have observed there is no reason any more to suspect the antiquity of the paintings of Altamira'.

All this Emile Carthailac wrote in the early summer of 1902. In August the French Association held its congress at Montauban. Carthailac brought the archaeologists over to Les Eyzies, to La Mouthe — they were all photographed outside, Carthailac, his gloomy face and long side-whiskers drooping above a butterfly collar, holding a long candle in one hand like a penitential sinner — and also to Les Combarelles and Font-de-Gaume. In August, too,



Carthailac had examined the cave at Marsoulas, which was down in his own country not a great way beyond Toulouse. He had confirmed the paintings, made out a great bison in red and black, and found for himself a number of new engravings. Carthailac asked the young Breuil to go down with him on another journey to the cave and make copies. Off they went, after the archaeological excursion to Les Eyzies; and finishing a day's work in Marsoulas they decided, with the experience of La Mouthe, Les Combarelles, Font-de-Gaume and now Marsoulas behind them, to journey then and there into Spain and examine for themselves, at last, the disputed, slighted, neglected, unvisited Altamira.

They reached Altamira, an unprotected hole behind bushes and brambles, on October 1, 1902, the first archaeologists of standing to condescend to walk into the cave since Harlé, honest devil of the piece, had made his unfortunate inspection in 1881. Young man and old man lit their candles, they looked, instead of a few days they stayed nearly a month, deciphering and copying day by day from morning until darkness, while rain off the Bay of Biscay (and how it can rain in these parts!) hurtled outside. Towards the end of October they left, 'grateful and delighted, enriched with an unexampled record of the most ancient paintings of the world'.

On this visit and during a visit the next year the young Breuil had copied all the paintings of Altamira, lying on his back in the damp cave, under the low roof, on sacks stuffed with straw and fern, with only candles to show him the colour and the detail, while droves of the most courteous Spaniards crowded around with inquisitive interruptions. When he settled to his first attempt, Breuil began to copy the great bison in watercolours; the paint would not dry in this north Spanish humidity. He changed to crayons, but he had no black, and rather than journey eighteen miles into Santander and eighteen miles back to the cave, he lit a fire outside and provided himself with burnt sticks and burnt cork. By 1908 many of his copies had been published in folio, in colour (yet in a guise far short of their real excellence) for the whole of a previously indifferent, ignorant, or hostile world to admire — and to accept. Early Man had become the Primal Painter, the Primal Master, more skilled, in his way, more clear in his vision than any realist or semi-realist of salon or academy or of that whole century of self-satisfaction which had so lately ended.



Such things choose their time. The time was now close when artists — especially those of France or Paris — would recognize art more widely in space and time and culture, with more health and humility.

The first paintings, then, had been discovered and acknowledged, and the acknowledged antiquity of man (which now stretches so much further back to *Pithecanthropus* making stone tools and using fire as well, at least in China, some five hundred thousand years ago) had given history a new depth. Bit by bit, object by object, layer by layer, correlation by correlation, a short modern half-century had led to this climax of Altamira and had sketched in something of the story of man in Europe during the Ice Age. Much was doubtful, more was irrecoverable, but there were names by this time to throw around, from 'Aurignacian' to 'Magdalenian'; and if these names were inventions, if they were to be transferred rather loosely from tools to peoples differentiated largely by inference and by the contrasting ways in which they fashioned these tools out of flint, the names were none the less vitalizing and useful. Frequently we see a peculiar man we do not know, whose 'real' name we do not know; but there he is again, slouching down the street: so we give him a nickname, and for us that name comes to hold his identity and actuality. In the same way these archaeological names applied to men whom we know only by skeleton and artifact, and the names have articulated them, resurrected them, and invested them with an altogether unexpected livingness. *O ye dry bones, hear the word of the archaeologist*; who has by now done a good job in bringing bone to his bone and setting the wind to breathe upon them in the valley.

But the names have changed, have increased, by amplification and sub-division, as we have corrected our knowledge or gained extra knowledge through another half-century, from this recognition of Altamira onwards.

How does the picture look now? Who, according to present views and the present store of evidence, were, for example — for our example —, the various painters and sculptors and draughtsmen of the Ice Age? How do names already thrown about in these four chapters, Aurignacian, Gravettian, Solutrean, Magdalenian, fit into time and country?

The new dating now suggests that from the beginning to the end, from the arrival in Europe of newcomers of our own stock of *Homo sapiens*, who ousted and replaced the last of the Neanderthaloids (though intermarrying with them to some degree, no doubt, as Anglo-Saxon intermarried to some degree with British, and as Norman fused with English), to the transformation at last of a cold, more or less bare Europe of big game and hunters and artists into a warmer, swampier, more extensively forested Europe without ice, inhabited by descendants who were hunters still, but more emphatically fowlers, fishers, eater of snails and shell-fish, and collectors of roots and fruits, there may have elapsed about a hundred and eighty centuries, or if it seems more apprehensible, a space of eighteen thousand years.

Here then, in the last epoch of the glaciers was an age of occasional invention, and slow alteration, adaptation, and mixture; and above all an age, until the last millennia, of migrations, of *Homo sapiens* on the move towards the Atlantic.

For touring and savouring the caves from Lascaux to Altamira, Castillo, Pindal, our need is not an intricate and detailed (and confusing) account of all the certainties, likelihoods, ambiguities, and speculations. We need only enough to orientate our experience, and give us at any rate a scale of the relationships in time. When the first migrants dribbled towards the west, Neanderthaloids were generally in possession; though territories had been shared with a scattering of men of another stock of *Homo sapiens*, going back (judging by the Swanscombe skull, found in 1935-1936 in a Kentish gravel-bed) more than two hundred thousand years before the present. These Neanderthaloids, users of fire, skilful tool-makers and courageous hunters, as we have seen, but no artists, had lived and spread across Europe in a long warm pleasant epoch before the glaciers began to thicken and devour once more, pushing their fringe of dirty ice down from Scotland and Norway and North Russia to the neighbourhood of Swansea, Sheffield, East Anglia, Hamburg and Berlin, Warsaw, Vilna, Vitebsk, and Cherepovetz, and crawling out from the Alps past Zürich towards the Black Forest, westward towards Lyons, eastward to Upper Austria and Styria. The Neanderthaloids survived into the new cold of this last tripartite glaciation some thirty thousand years ago, hunting the cold-adapted animals which lived between the northern and southern ice.



Among the new migrants our first concern is with the Aurignacians, hunters, quick-witted and nimble men of the kind Louis Lartet had disinterred in his Cro-Magnon shelter at Les Eyzies, Rivière in his sea-cave near Mentone, Buckland in Goat's Hole. The glaciers had advanced, then halted and retreated for a while, the Aurignacians entering from the east, from an Asiatic centre still undiscovered (in Persia perhaps), in a time when a far territory from the Crimea to the South of England and the Bay of Biscay was not too unfriendly. A few easterners were here before them — Châtelperronians (after Châtelperron, in Allier) who had trickled into France. They had no artists among them, and need not keep us long. Yet like the Aurignacians, and then Gravettians, they were equipped with one of the most revolutionary and afterwards most persistent items of our domesticity — the flint knife shaped surprisingly like our own pocket-knife, or pocket-knife blade, with a long sharp cutting edge, an end curving to a point, and a blunted back. Haft one of these blades in wood (as they were no doubt hafted by their knappers) and the modern pocket-knife of all work, from sharpening a pencil to scraping a stick or bellying a rabbit, stares at one out of the past. Gradually the new Upper Palaeolithic immigrants perfected several kinds of precision implements from flakes carefully knocked off a core of flint. As well as knives, they made tools which forerun the chisel, the plane, the spokeshave and all the scratching, picking, gouging, piercing, boring tools of our own ages of iron and steel — flint awls, bradawls, and spikes included. In short, these later palaeolithic tools argue adroit fingers with a variety of actions to perform, in contrast to tools used by the Neanderthaloids, mentioned in the last chapter, most of which, though ingeniously contrived from pebbles and flakes, betoken a more conservative, primitive addiction to rough cutting, scraping, dragging, banging; arguing less adroit fingers, less work of forefinger and thumb and more work with the whole hand grasping unhafted tools between the fingers and the palm.

In museum cases flint tools laid out in a row beyond reach or feel look in a way haphazard, as if Old Stone Age knappers could not repeat a tool in a given shape. Yet making them — for instance, making these knife blades of immigrating *Homo sapiens* — was an act of developed and assured craftsmanship; an elaborate craftsmanship which depended first of all upon a knowledge of flint itself.

Effective tools cannot be flaked and chipped from most flints which lie about on the ground or from any flint which happens to protrude from a chalk cliff. The best kinds are uncommon, and had to be searched for deep down in natural exposures of chalk. Eventually — but this was thousands of years later in the New Stone Age — such exposed seams were followed by mining.

Aurignacians added new implements of bone to their equipment, including bone points for their hunting spears (Neanderthaloids and their predecessors used spears of sharpened wood, including yew wood). They were less people of the plains than of the hills, especially the hill-country of the limestone abounding in caves, overhangs, and gorges; and with them painting and engraving on the rock begins. Their artists show their hand (this is no cliché) in finger-scrrawlings in the clay of Pech-Merle, Gargas, and other caves, in hand and finger stencils on the rock; next in energetic drawings, or line-paintings, and engravings of a naturalism emphasizing and concentrating the spirit of animals by curtailment and distortion. Aurignacians have a share (perhaps) in the first and simplest paintings at Lascaux.

Climate turned damp, then colder again, and colder still and dryer in consequence, as the pincers of the ice nipped Europe in a repeated advance. New arrivals now spread across Europe on the plains of loess — which is a deposit of dust blown in dry arctic conditions off moraines bordering the glaciers and off naked surfaces of land. This dust, softly descending in layer upon layer, for age after age, produced the grass steppes of Russia and eastern Europe. Steppes — and grazing animals to match — spread in a narrowing corridor from east to west. After the animals, especially horse, came the Gravettians (named from the rock-shelter of La Gravette in the valley of the Couze, one of the tributaries of the Dordogne), allied probably to the earlier Châtelperronian settlers. In the east, in Russia and Czechoslovakia, these plainsmen built the first houses that we know of by excavation, earth-houses or huts, sometimes made partly of mammoth bones; these mammoth-hunting Gravettians of eastern Europe even discovered the use of coal. Since, by origin, Gravettians were not people of hill and rock, their characteristic art which they brought with them out of Russia, was carving (also modelling) little three-dimensional figurines — figures of animals and especially fertility figures of women. Often the material was mammoth ivory.



The Gravettians made use, when they found them, of caves and shelters, and were given to burying their dead in caves in red ochre (like the Aurignacians). Through contact with the Aurignacians, perhaps, they took to engraving on pebbles and pieces of bone, to cave painting and engraving, painting with colour spread between the bounding lines, as in Lascaux, in which most of the animals seem to have been Gravettian. England, as we have seen, was largely a Gravettian, a central European, rather than a French, outpost; where Gravettians in their late survival were touched by influences out of France. Some day in England, in some deposit of sand or gravel, beside some ancient pool or mere, we may still discover Gravettian earth-houses to add to the meagre evidence of the caves.

The cold increased, and Solutreans (named after the horse-hunters' station at Solutré, a craggy wine-village a few miles from Mâcon in the east of France (Saône-et-Loire), where the underlying Gravettian deposits of the bones of horses were more than ten feet thick) now present their enigma. Flint tools delightfully crisp, regular, and delicate, a new departure altogether in sense of form and rhythm, some of them shaped like willow leaves, intrude into western and central Europe, perhaps coming from Spain and Africa. If in fact these Solutrean implements imply a people invading or infiltrating from the south among Gravettians and Aurignacians, it seems they were a people who specialized in hunting the wild horse and the reindeer — and carving the likeness of horses as well on the smooth rock of the gorges. Their fine tools were made by a new technique in which a final shape and sharpness were given, not by knocking chips off the flint, but by pressing them off with a piece of stick or bone; a difference, for nicety of result, like the difference between the rough hammering and the neat filing of metal.

The special phase of the Solutreans was short, at least by an Upper Palaeolithic unrolling of centuries; and while the cold between the glaciers north and south was still severe, western Europe knew its first Magdalenians, called from that shelter which Édouard Lartet and Henry Christy had excavated at La Madeleine. Nearer to the ice-fields the steppe gave way to tundra, sodden on the top in the brief summers, frozen always underneath, rich in mosses, low shrubs, where there was shelter enough, and a spring and summer vegetation, all too brief, ranging from brilliant marsh-marigolds to bog-bean and cotton-grass. In the south of Europe, despite the smaller

Alpine glaciers and still smaller glaciers of the Pyrenees, dry steppe would shade off to cool damp forest. If there were at first actual Magdalenian invaders, these additional immigrants in this long age of migrations may have been specially adapted to hunting animals of



*Magdalenians. Engravings from Grotte de la Marche*

the tundra and the forest, including reindeer, bison, and red deer, though they hunted horses and wild oxen no less than the people they came amongst; and no doubt mammoth and woolly rhinoceros as well, when chance offered, although these two creatures gradually became more scarce.

Yet 'Magdalenian' covers more than a last wave of invaders: it covers a fusion, in France and around the bend into Spain along the Bay of Biscay and the Cantabrian Sea, of Upper Palaeolithic peoples, of Upper Palaeolithic cultures, into one developing Magdalenian culture, at the heart of which were the most colourful of the painted caves. Reindeer (except in the forest regions of their Spanish territory) became their most abundant animal, their chief game, and at last the substance of their economy. They specialized in tools of bone and antler, they used spear-throwers and developed the barbed



reindeer spears, used perhaps on the summer-fattened reindeer as they swam rivers on migration. In the forest regions these 'harpoons' were also turned against red deer. From reindeer antler they continued to make for themselves, with more artistry, those hole-pierced branched objects in use long before, which have never been satisfyingly explained by archaeologists. An old idea, expressed in the name *bâton-de-commandement*, is that in some fashion they were ceremonially or ritually employed. The holes, at any rate, seldom show signs of wear, suggesting that they were not used, as most experts maintain, either for straightening slender spear shafts or to soften and stretch thongs of hide.<sup>1</sup> With some of the earliest needles, neatly shaped of bone, and with thread divided, no doubt, from reindeer tendons and sinews, the Magdalenians stitched fur and hide garments, close-fitting against the rawness and grimness of a climate which, at last, slowly, slowly grew more kind with the final dwindling of the glaciers. They probably made no use of bow and arrow, though bows were known to the Solutreans, and were regular hunting weapons on the far side of the Pyrenees in eastern Spain, and were adopted by the peoples of the mesolithic or Middle Stone Age.

Though the Magdalenians hunted the fat reindeer on their summer feeding-grounds in the north and took to intercepting them and following them on their migration from north to south, the cave districts were their base, their winter billets, emotionally their home, one must conclude, where they lived under the overhangs of rocks and in the mouths of caves (but not in their depths); and if their 'capitals' were in the Dordogne, the Pyrenean foothills, and Biscayan and Cantabrian Spain, they spread outside these capital areas of their cave art and ritual into the limestone of Switzerland and across the Rhine into the limestone hills of Württemberg and the south-west of Germany, carrying with them at least their skill in engraving and carving on bone and horn.

At last, with the better climate, their animals diminished or disappeared, their lives changed some ten thousand or more years ago in response to the new environment of swamp and forest and moderate warmth, and their peculiar art lost its purpose and its drive, and died away. Yet these were the people, the fused culture at least, whose

<sup>1</sup> My own guess, their abundance hinting that they were used more or less by every man, is that men carried them in dances, perhaps tufted with feathers or other decoration.

artists took painting to its extreme of multi-coloured naturalistic splendour. They are not quite the first men to create so that we can feel and appreciate the record of their emotions and desires, but they surely present, on their slower scale of time, the first human achievement which is great or classic in the sense of Egypt, or China, Athens, Florence, or Paris.

As radio-carbon datings multiply, no doubt the 18,000 years from Aurignacian beginnings in Western Europe to Magdalenian finale will be more accurately divided and sub-divided. As for exactly why the artists of these long, slow, cultures painted, drew, and carved, how much in the end does it matter? In visiting the caves, in reading the descriptive, theoretical literature of the caves, I have tried to find an answer for myself, I will admit; I shall try to give an answer, though it is better still to enjoy, each in our own way without worrying, the best of the work they have left to us.

And so long as we keep in mind just so much of Ice Age conditions of life, we should enjoy the caves and the shelters as we find them today, in today's circumstances, with orchids in the meadows, wild strawberries scarlet on the hot limestone, and wine in the cafés.

Keep in mind, at any rate, the Upper Palaeolithic, Western European span, from about 30,000 B.C. to about 12,000 B.C.



## V

### The First Caverns

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THERE IS WINE at Lascaux. The road curves up: a car-park, and notices, and beaten paths broken by the roots of trees, then chairs and tables and stalls under the trees, certainly indicate a cave *bien aménagé*. Before I went to Lascaux, I had imagined a milieu altogether different, rather in terms of Derbyshire or the West Riding or King Arthur's Cave above the Wye. It was to be wilder, rockier, lonelier. I left out of my picture Swedes and Finns in cloth caps, Dutchwomen round as their own Queen, English schoolmistresses in pale blue, enormous Texans in ten-gallon hats, and an American family of harassed father, edgy mother, and irritated crop-headed boys. Yet the degree of exploitation is mild, the tact considerable. The road aims for the cavern, and stops; there is a cottage in the scrub, but the scrub extends around the cottage, the café, the stalls, at last the cave, with a dry indifference. If guides, waitresses, and all today's visiting mankind suddenly evaporated, the black scrub of this Perigord Noir would quickly grow round the cars they had left on the car-park, would soon creep over the identity letters, from GB to NZ, NL to USA; would soon obliterate jugs and ash-trays and bowls and tables and chairs; earth and stone would slip over the steps, over the concrete doorway and the steel doors; juniper and brambles would return, and Lascaux would withdraw into its old multi-millennial silence and invisibility, a few oddments, the cap of a fountain-pen, a nylon scarf, the heel off a shoe, remaining to tell of the additional but now evaporated, liquidated, pilgrims.

So it feels when you arrive at the top of the hill, on a plateau so oddly absorbative, and so lonely in spite of the crunch of cars. On the surface, there is no point in being here rather than somewhere else. There is no drama, there is no special beauty. On the surface, everything — the chairs, the stalls, the postcards, the guide-books, the electric wires running to the cave — everything except ground and vegetation appears precisely superficial and transitory. If it thundered when I climbed to Lascaux for the first time, and rained, and

cleared, and thundered again, it simply added to the feeling that everything, everybody, on top was of less account than a wood-ant or an inch-worm. The place emptied. On the stalls the jugs, the ash-trays, a-sprawl with palaeolithic fauna from underground, were covered, the chairs and the tables were tipped up against the trees and were awash with rain.

It cleared, the sun came out. Human inch-worms and wood-ants re-emerged. A guide appeared (the Lascaux guides are still those boys, now grown-up with wives and fast cars, who first discovered the paintings when their dog fell down a hole up here on the hill on September 12, 1940); the guide walked down the steps and unlocked the door; and we were in the vestibule, and at last — no, the lights were stricken by the storm, and we had not enough torches, and the other two guides had not returned from their lunch in Montignac; and we still waited, still on the transitory outside of things.

After a while, on that occasion, in the half-gloom of this vestibule underground, the half-gloom of this post-card-selling, ticket-selling airlock, one of the very tall and very wide and very outlandish Texans in ten-gallon hats bent down and spoke to the harassed young American father, feeling that he would be a man of knowledge, since he sat there reading a book in as much light as came through the outer door.

'What would you say these Lascaux pictures here are?' said Ten Gallons, holding postcards he had just bought of all that was still unrevealed beyond the blankness of the second door.

The reader looked up. He and his family had driven that morning all the way from Brest, four hundred miles if a mile, and Lascaux was a first interlude on their pilgrimage — his pilgrimage — to Athens and the Parthenon. The large book was *Zeus*, by A. B. Cook.

'Religious,' said the reader of *Zeus*, 'and magical.'

'What's your book?' The Texan smiled down, as though he had forgotten his first enquiry.

'About the Greek gods,' said the don or schoolmaster on the way to Greece. 'About Zeus' (who had thundered on the hill outside, and was still rumbling a bit in the distance).

'Zeus was a bull-god,' he went on. 'And you'll find bulls on the wall inside.'

*Opposite.* LEFT. Outside the Grotte de la Vache.

RIGHT. In the Vézère Valley.









'Bulls? Steers? I don't know.' Ten Gallons showed a vaguer concern.

'And Zeus had to do with caves as well as bulls——'

'Oh, he did?' Ten Gallons still smiled and was benign, but losing interest.

'—— had to do with the earth, you know —— subterranean. I guess religion begins——'

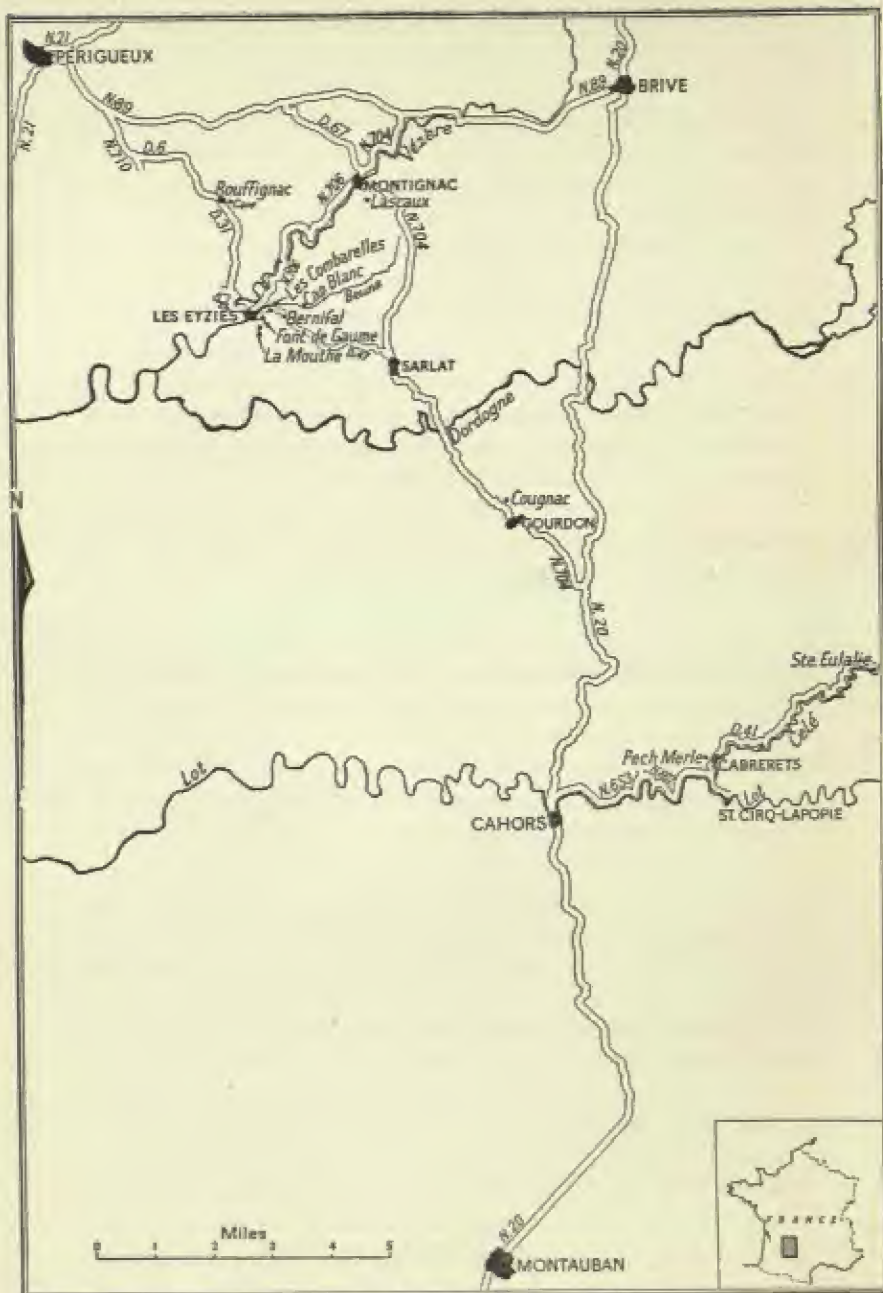
And Ten Gallons who did not care where religion began, never discovered, since at that moment the other two guides arrived, everyone crowded back to make room for them and cheered, and one of the two bored children in blue jeans knocked Zeus from his father's hands on to the dirty floor, and the door to inner darkness was opened, and till the thunder-stricken, Zeus-stricken lights reasserted themselves, all of us now crept down and forward with electric torches, party by small party, around the cave.

Perhaps this was the way to experience Lascaux for the first time, moving in darkness, picking out with one's own torch individual image after image, letting images fade into shadow, going forward again in darkness to another beast across the rock in a pregnant or full-stomached liveliness. As we moved about we had no idea of the scale of the cave, the dimensions of the contained darkness. That was good, just as it was good to have made a solemn and rather slow, hesitating entry into the darkness; for when the full electricity suddenly glared on, after twenty minutes, the change, the effect, was both disappointing and astounding — astounding, because by full light Lascaux, immediately around you, all around you, is rich, is indeed brilliant in the abundance of its earth and rock colours; disappointing — just a little, at any rate — because the cave is small, shaped variously but without much natural drama. Down the steps, in the Hall of the Bulls, rock surfaces come within about fifteen feet of you, upon either side; the roof presses down twenty feet above the floor, and the limit of your view is scarcely a hundred and ten feet ahead. A passage to the right, at the far end of the hall, takes you little more than another thirty yards into constricting space, a passage straight on diminishes and comes to a stop after twenty yards.

There are caves in which you have to search for the paintings — what is left of them — in front of your eyes, have to follow your guide's wand until suddenly, magically, bison, ox, mammoth, horse, detaches itself, and you apprehend it, at last, as a whole and as a

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*Opposite.* Inside Lascaux: note the Swimming Deer high up on the right, the huge cow in calf on the left, and a bison.



1. Caves of the Dordogne and Lot



creature. In Lascaux, nothing of the kind: here the animals dictate, insist upon themselves, here on the light surfaces of calcite, red, black, yellow, brown, even violet, the animals are as clear as illuminated beasts on vellum. My own reactions have varied between disappointment in Lascaux, and exhilaration. The drawing of the figures has depressed me as spidery or clumsy or lacking in volume. Enormous bulls with their members poised are painted over reluctant red cows of another species with their tails down, by artists whose grasp of them was ungainly. Away down the passage to the right, where it widens into the Nave, seven feet or so of the wall is occupied by two bison, tails up (they are tail to tail), prancing forwards with members again at the ready — clumsy creatures as well, whose clumsiness in nature has not been mastered and turned to a vivid formal account, a fine formalized energy, as in other caves by other painters. And within the animal contours, again and again in Lascaux, pigment has been puffed softy and suavely on to the bodies through little blow-pipes of hollow bone, in a technique too reminiscent of the commercial artist and his colour-gun.

But then — horses and stags and liveliness.

Make for the horses crowded into the passage which opens ahead of the Main Hall: they are long, they are painted in black outline with black manes around bodies of yellowy brown. Look for the tumbled horse, upside down at the end of the passage, driven perhaps over a cliff; look for the fat little mare with black mane and tiny head and short legs on the right of the passage, assailed by a flight of feathered spears or darts (which are *not* arrows, by the way, from a bow, which was unknown to these Gravettian artists). The drawing has nothing sloppy. It is nervous, free, assured, expert, made by the most feeling hand, by a will acutely and tenderly feeling both the horse-image held in mind and the horse-image as it completes itself upon the rock. Search up the side passage on the right, on the left wall, for the engraved little head of a whiskery horse, thrust forward on a long neck (difficult to find since the whole engraving is hardly seven inches long). Feel the softness of its muzzle and the engraver's sympathy with its life. Search along this Nave, on the same left-hand wall as you go down, for a horse engraved and painted black, quite still, unlike the brisk little mare assailed by the feathery bolts, its head raised, and one foreleg raised a little; and observe, as in a painting by Chagall, but without his whimsy, the

smaller horse painted and engraved inside this larger one, between the lines of back and belly.

Opposite, on the right-hand wall, five deer are drawn in black manganese — black oxide of manganese. They are in a row, heads and necks only; and they are interpreted, with reason, it appears to me, as swimming in file across a river which was suggested perhaps by the line of shade and recession in the rock underneath. In the Apse off this wall a stag has been engraved, three feet of him from tine to hoof, in pride and tenderness on the rock. The engraver has concentrated on the tenderness of muzzle and throat below the hard tangle of the antlers, on the calm eye, the long concave line of his neck, on this fellow-creature's superbness of carriage. In the passage again of the fat little painted elegant mare and the other yellowy-brown and black horses, look for another stag, in black, snuffing the air, and raising a spider tangle of antlers.

These are master-drawings, after all.

In Lascaux you meet your first superimpositions — figure painted without regard over figure, pointing to utility in cave painting; you encounter superimpositions, renewals, touchings-up, additions, you encounter pregnancies and masculinities — practical attention, in brief, to the fertility and the supply of game. In Australian caves they paint figures of the cult-heroes on whom rain depends, and of totem animals. To ensure the rains and ensure that the totem animals increase, Australians touch up the older figures from time to time with fresh ochres, fresh charcoal, or white clay. Some writers maintain that if such paintings are part of a ritual aimed at fertility, if they are useful in that way, indeed necessary, if they can be ruthlessly superimposed, then in making them there can be no 'art', no delight in the process and the result.

Lascaux, first of all, shows this to be wrong. True, the Lascaux artists work within their Upper Palaeolithic conventions, chief of which is to depict every animal sideways on — in other words, to show as much of the animal as can be shown, in its most recognizable aspect. True that the Upper Palaeolithic artist does not want to compose scenes in our own manner, as a rule; that he gives all his effort to the solitary image, or in particular to images two by two (if at Lascaux the stags are swimming a river in file and are for once composed, then perhaps the five of them form a single image of



vulnerability in the hunt. Hunting people like to catch animals as they swim). True as well that the artist leaves the environment of the animal to be inferred.

He composes, all the same; he composes each figure, he exacts rhythm in each animal from attitude, from the play of limbs and contours, or the pattern of the branching of antlers. He makes no mechanical repetitions, and his painting, engraving, drawing, are evidences of delight. Yet the artist's delight in painting, engraving, drawing inside the cave those animals he verifies constantly and knows intimately in his life outside the cave, is not at all 'disinterested', but interested to an extreme, — interested in the purpose of his image. He knows his animal, horse or deer; he loves his animal, perhaps feels that he belongs to its family, perhaps worships it, perhaps regards it as the vehicle of a life or soul which was once in a human body, though he hunts it and lives by it. So in painting it, probably to secure both increase and success in hunting, he not only paints with knowledge and love, but he paints all of his cosmology, his enjoyment of the act corresponding to a need of his life, and his tribe's life. If he superimposes, what matters is not the animals already there and now underneath, but the new immediate animal on which he is busy with all his heart and being and skill.

Lascaux is also a first lesson in the naturalism of cave art. Archaeologists knowing little of art talk of these animal paintings as 'realistic', which they never are. No engraving, no painting in this or other caves, is realistic or photographic. Colours sometimes approximate, no doubt, to the real colour of the animals; but in Lascaux if the large, indeed enormous, wild bulls are black, which is proper to their species, the black *Bos taurus primigenius*, and if the small cows are red, which is equally proper to their red species, *Bos longifrons*, the red deer, after all, are painted black, and some of them almost yellow. In Lascaux the two bison tail to tail are very dark brown, as they should be, in other caves they are made black, bright red, or splendidly mixed in colour. Every animal, next, is simplified. Detail is selected, detail is suppressed. In Lascaux horns and antlers are slewed round, as though ox, bull, or stag was facing you, instead of sideways to your vision. Hoofs are frequently slewed round to show the cleft. Commonly, though, in this brilliant animal-impressionism, or hunter's impressionism, the artist allows no conclusion to an animal's legs, emphasizing life and being just as a modern

draughtsman will emphasize the life and being, for example, of a tree by the incompleteness of the enclosing lines which do not terminate at the same length.

In this hunter's impressionism the artist emphasizes only (yet how much it contains!) a hunter's profile, marking only distinctive lively elements, the head, ears, horns, the eye, the sensitive nose, the arching tail, the strong penis, the pregnant curve of the belly.

'Naturalism' is the word for the animals of cave art: they are recognizable images of the natural, acutely emphasizing and combining elemental traits of life; they are not the sentimental copies of the academic realist, they are not the merely useful copies of the facsimilist; they do not just explain or enlighten ignorance or enable you to recognize a creature like an illustration in a handbook of mammals. By their excellence the best of the engravings, the drawings, the paintings, imparted a shock or excitement of perception, which led to a meaning; and that meaning was not merely magical, I think ('by keeping these images crisp I kill more red deer, more young horses'); it was sacramental, indicating all the life, all the *raison d'être*, enjoyed by men but also enjoyed by the animals they hunted (and worshipped?), to whom they were kin, and in whom that *raison d'être* was most felt and recognized. So Lascaux was a storehouse of red deer life, horse life, ox life, ibex life — indeed, of life itself, as Chartres or another cathedral or a parish church can be felt as a storehouse of deity.

At a glance, then, not as a cave, but as a cave with paintings, Lascaux is superbly chromatic, superbly impressive: more so than any cave yet discovered, including Altamira; in a closer scrutiny it offers you bad paintings and good ones, dull engravings and engravings elegant and tense with all of that life which is more than the life of the individual typifying the particular species. Lascaux, too, offers much information, and remains (so does every cave) full of problems and ambiguities and difficulties of interpretation. The combinations of coloured rectangles on the wall, each related to an ox — how are they to be explained? As traps? As pitfalls? How does one explain the straight-horned pregnant 'mythical' creature painted in the Main Hall? How should one interpret the engraving of long, close converging lines in the Nave, which Breuil takes to be a medicine-man in a grass dancing-costume, though less excitingly it may be a grass hut?



And when is Lascaux to be dated? For which of the culture-groups of the Upper Palaeolithic was it a storehouse of the inner life? Breuil divides cave art into two vast cycles, a cycle of the first-comers, the Aurignacians and Gravettians (in French books and guidebooks you find 'Perigordian' for 'Gravettian'), then a cycle of the art of Solutreans and Magdalenians. The style of Lascaux, on the analogy of art elsewhere sealed in by deposits which can be dated, and the fauna of Lascaux, both suggest that the painters of most of the paintings, the engravers of most of the engravings, were Gravettian hunters of animals of the steppe, or the bush-steppe, before the cold became too severe, bringing with it naked landscapes, the shag-haired mammoth, and the rhinoceros in his coat of wool.

As you go round, they do not let you climb seven feet down the shaft at the far end of the Apse to stare at the panel in black line of the disembowelled bison, the dead man, and the bird on a stick. Aesthetically you are not the worse off, since the drawing of this panel is some of the poorest in the cave. In other ways the panel points fascinatingly to the date of Lascaux. A rhinoceros walks away to the left (perhaps after killing the man and ripping the bison); and he confirms rather than contradicts. He is probably not the later Woolly Rhinoceros who grubbed head downward on a frozen, snowy, treeless, sub-arctic Dordogne; but the earlier Merck's Rhinoceros, soon to be extinct, who held his head and horns up, more or less, and forward; eating leaves from the bushes and trees of a milder time. (Plates facing pages 65 & 80.)

Up the steps and outside, men's faces, women's faces in the revisited sunshine of France are difficult to read. How was Ten Gallons impressed? Or the don with *Zeus* under his arm? Or the plain Dutch ladies, or the young schoolmistresses from London? Outside the great cathedrals of France or the great shrines of Italian art the faces settle into a more familiar mould of appreciation. I had noticed on faces at Chartres, a few days before, out in the sun after experiencing the poppy and cornflower solidarities and translucences inserted into the blackness, quite a different look. We may have *felt*; but there at Chartres we knew what to feel; and we knew the language, more or less, of the glass, and also of the long figures we stared up to in the sunshine.

But Lascaux, and the language of Lascaux? It seemed, as we went

down the path on which the sun had now dried up the last dark stains of the downpour, as we went from the cave to the souvenir stall, the stall to the cars, that visitors to Lascaux and visitors to Chartres and the cathedrals differed — in this sense, at any rate, that Chartres has not only its cathedral habitués, not only its black-dressed widows of the town, its black-frocked old maids, but its particular kinds of art-visitor. Germans come on the trail of culture, and stay inside longer than anyone except the widows and the old maids and the cleaners who sweep the floor everlastingly with wet saw-dust. Old English manor-house ladies speaking deliberate but easy French exactly as if it were English, lean on their canes, hobble, take the windows and the carvings with a 'serious', cultured triviality. They have pinched faces, and open nostrils wide as the nostrils of the horses they used to ride, and are ill-dressed beside the richly-satined, mauve-powdered, wrinkled old American honeys held together by their jewels and their corsets, who are less pliable — and more cultured.

But Lascaux? To Lascaux these kinds do not come. We are perhaps a coarser and younger lot who come here, as if Lascaux were no more than a cave, no more than a curiosity of nature, or a peep-show at a mop fair; worse still, as if it were no more than an artless archaeological exhibit, offering to those who are not experts only the rather trite wonders of the passage of time, or else nothing but enigmas (though enigmas are not to be despised), like a game of historical solitaire. At Lascaux, indeed, you pay to enter, you listen to guides, you are hustled in, hustled through, hustled out; and the language of the paint, of the animals, is remote, unfamiliar, unlearned, uninterpreted; though it is no less the language of a whole cosmology.

The cars turn and descend their three hundred feet to Montignac and the Vézère; but since for most tourists Lascaux is an episode *en route*, the small town below is not always as crowded as you might expect; there may be room, perhaps, in the Soleil-d'Or where the huge sloping trees of a neglected garden patter with thunder-rain or distil a green light into bedroom and dining-room. Down the valley towards Les Eyzies, twenty-two miles away, there are small hotels in St Leon and other villages. Go down the valley you must, for at any rate an inkling of La Mouthe, Les Combarelles, Font-de-Gaume,



Cap Blanc, and the cliff circumstances of life so many thousands of years ago. Once upon a time Baring-Gould, the poet of *Onward Christian Soldiers*, delivered himself of a curious, in some ways accurate, description of the scene towards Les Eyzies. The cliffs, he wrote, 'have been ploughed by the weather in long horizontal furrows, so that they lean over as though desirous of contemplating their dirty faces in the limpid water'. 'Streaked by black tricklings from above', he declared, the cliffs on either side show a face like that 'of a pale, dirty, and weeping child with a cold in its head, who does not use a pocket handkerchief'. (Plate facing page 64.)

Yes and no. The black dribblings are there, and the long furrows, but so are the contrasts — contrasts of form, contours, volumes, regularity, and irregularity; contrasts of grey and black and the gold of limestone, of hard and soft, of rock with green above and green below. The Lombardy poplars along the river, the chestnut soil, the crops, the shaven hayfields, the edgings of wild flowers, contradict Perigord Noir. On a quiet evening in May, in June, this is a valley of Paradise, or at least of Beulah along the edges of Paradise, especially if you see it first under a full sun, and then when a full yellow moon rounds itself over the eastern wall. Evenings here are full of wonder. The whole valley and every detail are clarified in a light which the cliffs catch and hold and intensify by reflection. The light shines along the rods of fishermen crouched below these cliffs, which bulge, and hide behind trees, and peer out again, and project, and retreat, above the black looking-glass of the Vézère. Gustave Courbet in his pictures of limestone cliff and gorge and river and vegetation (his country was near the Alps) bears truer witness to the delightfulness and liquidness of such a valley than Baring-Gould, who must have come to Les Eyzies on a cold wet day in March when storm showers swept towards Montignac as grey as the rock on either side.

Plenty of people along these twenty-two miles still live on the underside of the grey flutings, in houses roofed half with tiles, half with the bulge of rock; and beam-holes again and again, now choked with maidenhair fern, and windows into the cliff, tell that there was a still larger population of semi-troglodytes between now and the Middle Ages. The living dwell on top of the dead — for instance, along the cliff at Laugerie Basse and Laugerie Haute. When Lartet and Christy excavated at Laugerie Basse they dug down through the actual bedroom of a cliff-house into the Magdalenian levels. At Le

Moustier, on the same side of the river, but not so far down, holes cut into the rock show that a house was once built above all the occupation levels down to the Mousterian, in which a Mousterian burial was reached in 1908. Here the shelters are opposite the church and behind the *épicerie*, in a section of the cliff coming out to a cape some way back from the river. In the lowest shelter, the shelter of the burial, the excavators have left a mound or pillar of earth *in situ* showing these various stratifications downwards in level and backwards in time to the Mousterian, with a black-and-white board alongside marked off like a thermometer to explain matters, and a penthouse of tiles jutting from the rock overhead to keep off the rain. It is possible to go up the path between the shelter and the *épicerie* and then climb from out-thrust terrace to terrace of a series scoring the cliff, each with its own depth of soil and its own vegetation, like the shelves of a bookcase. Flakes of very black flint lie about on these terraces by the hundred.

No need to stay a great while in Les Eyzies, where Louis Lartet's Cro-Magnon shelter is now the garage of a Cro-Magnon Hotel and where a statue of Cro-Magnon Man (not at all like him) stares out from an unsatisfactory cliff-museum above a street dedicated to Cro-Magnon salesmanship. The problem, though, is where to go first outside Les Eyzies, which cave to take first: risking, whether it is La Mouthe, Font-de-gaume, or Les Combarelles, an anticlimax after the colours and concentration of Lascaux.

Shall it be Les Combarelles, a mile or so outside? It offers engravings, in either branch of a double cave, which are difficult to see and appreciate.

Font-de-Gaume, then, which is nearer still? The splendid polychromatic animals are only splendid now in picture-books: they were faded when Henri Breuil, Louis Capitan, and Denis Peyrony, the schoolmaster from Les Eyzies, first saw them in 1901, and they have faded still more in the half-century.

La Mouthe? No, take La Mouthe last, for its peculiarities; Les Combarelles first, up the side-valley of the Beune.

Each of this trio of caverns properly introduces the French guide. At Lascaux the guides combine driving with guide-lecturing, as it might be in the National Gallery or in a ducal mansion drawing its half-crowns. At the smaller or less magnetic caves the guide leads; and he leads a smaller flock with which his relation is at once more



intimate and dictatorial. To begin with, he waits and you wait — and wait — outside the locked entrance until the party is numerous enough to be worth his while; and you are the merest digit of disregardable mankind and he is the commissar. In this situation of a people's democracy, he likes the sheep of his flock to be sheep-witted, to obey orders, to say 'Ah!', and to 'remember' him as they return to daylight. He is a French peasant, he relies more upon his rote, is more easily put out by interruptions as he displays the art of his own ancestors. If you show independence, if you linger and are too interested, he is displeased — particularly displeased if you display a prior knowledge, if you are obviously aware he is not revealing everything that could or should be revealed in the cave, or everything you would like to examine.

At Les Combarelles the guide has difficulties. The cave is small and awkward and can take only small flocks at a time; added to which few of the great number of engraved animals inside — nearly three hundred — are, as I say, easily detected or quickly grasped. Till a flock emerges from the cliff you may have to wait some while, though a brief idleness is pleasant here in the sunlight. The dene opens off the road, into the woods. On one side the guide's white-and-brown farmhouse is tucked under the limestone, under the trees rooted at a higher level. Very white hens with very red combs peck and scrape and cackle and cluck. Smoke curves from the chimney, wheat as blue as the smoke spreads across the narrowing triangle of the dene in front of the hens and the house and the scraped earth, and waves gently, and reveals the flat brilliant eyes of corncockle staring up at a sky innocent of clouds. At one end of the house a ladder scrambles up to and into a hayloft, and the roof cuts across the blackness of the cave, which now yawns in the sunlit face of the rock beyond a low crumbling wall. Contemplating this rurality, you wait for the Shepherd and his Sheep to file out of a black doorway in the wall, past bicycles, bedsteads, and a grindstone sheltered by the cantilevering rock. A pleasant encouraging atmosphere of shabbiness, use, habitude, contra-indicates all the vulgar processes of sight-seeing. Indeed men have lived here a long while, by the brook which runs down to the road, by this wheat field, precisely under these woods, under the stratified rock on which they grow; and before his Daily Sheep arrive and when they have gone, the Shepherd of the Cave has ground to dig and plough and harrow in the dene, logs to split,

children to direct or scold, animals to feed — some of them inside the cave.

It is your turn, you join the flock, you become a sheep. *Le museau*, declares your shepherd, in the narrow dirtiness deep inside Les Combarelles — and how used you become to this recital, this intoned litany of cave art, from Les Combarelles to the Pyrenees. *Le museau*, he repeats, wagging his wand, his own *bâton-de-commandement*, an eighth of an inch off the rock, *le museau*; and still you see nothing intelligible. The wand begins to move and draw. *L'oeil*, says the flat voice, neither patient nor impatient, *les oreilles, la crinière, et le dos*. The descriptive wand has advanced nearly three feet. A creature begins to appear — appears, at last. *Voici la queue*, and so it is, so it is, *la queue*, the hairy, curving, incurving tail of a wild horse. The wand wiggles down. *Voici les pattes derrière, le ventre* — the creature drawn from a consciousness of creatures killed and eaten so immeasurably long ago takes volume — *et les pattes avant*; and you and I and all of us in the cave feel clever to have comprehended, at last, the whole sullen stockiness of a wild horse, by such slow degrees. *Voici* — the guide is off again, beside another bulb fixed to the rock spreading a feeble illumination over its surface and filling engraved lines with creative shadow — *Voici le museau, les cornes*, and we disentangle from the mess of lines a reindeer, antlers held back, *museau* thrust softly forward; or else an ibex with all of its cocky look of goatish insensibility. We have lost the sense of space here in the discomfort and grubby claustrophobia of Les Combarelles, a hundred and eighty yards, two hundred yards, from the blue wheat and the corncockles, the blue smoke and the blue sky; we have traced with our own eyes, at last, engravings of horse, reindeer, ibex, lions, or felines, mammoths, oxen, and bears, and do not like to admit to ourselves that we have not, after all, made out quite a number of the figures delineated for us by the flat voice and the wiggling wand; and we have seen men, at last, Upper Palaeolithic men — at any rate, men wearing animal heads, a man with the tusks of a mammoth.

Les Combarelles, in fact, has a good deal to say, a good deal more than we are likely to take in as we shuffle from light into narrow gloom and from gloom back to light. These little scratched images of men, for example, drawn so crudely, beside these other animals drawn with such verve and grace: Man, they say, was not an object of



the hunt, man could be taken for granted, man was less interested by man, and drew him on the cave walls with indifference, masked usually in some animal disguise, and usually in some animal relationship. In Les Combarelles there is also an odd, ill-drawn group of a couple of stooping, unshapely, big-bellied humans, one following the other, one decidedly male, one female. An early book describes it with a degree of coyness and dubiety as *scène intime*(?). For all its poor drawing, this group in Les Combarelles does typify the compulsion of cave art. Do not fear that the caves are at all the brothels of Pompeii or the lavatory walls of the male English. Yet sex is sex. Emotions about impregnation, pregnancy and increase and abundance, and so about life and death, determine most of Upper Palaeolithic art, from the renowned 'mother goddesses' which the Gravettians carved in three dimensions, to the bulls of Lascaux and the bison of Altamira. In Les Combarelles the two humans act as other animals act in scene after scene in the caves. They are not coupling, they follow each other as wild stallion follows wild mare, as bull follows cow, as stag follows doe, in a purposeful flirtation. From the *scène intime*(?) here in Les Combarelles, it is only a few miles upstream, further up the valley of the Beune (which flows into the Vézère), to the long bulging overhangs of Laussel, under which Dr Lalanne discovered several carvings in relief in 1911 and 1912. One of them can be seen in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, the 'Venus of Laussel' portraying a tubby, prolific-seeming, faceless, big-breasted fat-thighed woman like the Gravettian 'Venus of Willendorf'. She was once painted red, and she flourishes a bison's horn of abundance in one hand. She is famous, this Venus of Laussel, a star of the Upper Palaeolithic whose likeness appears in book after book. Few books, though, more than mention the first relief Dr Lalanne discovered, which with a degree of stylization represents the coupling of two humans. Add relief carvings of the image familiar in the grain of wheat and in the cowrie which were found under rock shelters at Sergeac between Les Eyzies and Montignac, or the Venus reliefs which were uncovered on the living rock above the river at Angles-sur-l'Anglin, away in Vienne, in 1950, and you have a fuller and franker idea of the motivation of the first artists.

Was it a worse motive than the one which made Titian depict, as Venus, the more elegant of the tarts of Venice?

Back at the entrance of Les Combarelles, the guide may beckon his sheep, supposing he is not too pushed or too busy, into the second gallery, past mossy alcoves boarded up for his oddments and his animals (in one of them a spaniel bitch, it may be, with her puppies); and he may reveal to them, very low on the wall, the best of all the representations of a Woolly Rhinoceros. Unlike the leaf-plucking Merck's Rhinoceros down the well in Lascaux with head held forward, here he is in the cold company of mammoths with his head and horns down, as if grunting and grubbing for food over the half-frozen ground. So hard to imagine in the milieu of an arctic or sub-arctic world, so long extinct, remaining only in bones and skeletons, and fragmentary carcasses which were pickled in salt and petroleum in the Galician oilfields, or preserved like mammoths in frozen deposits in Siberia (where the horn is used for bows and tobacco pipes and sledge-runners), this strange Woolly Rhinoceros is not very common in the cave art, on the walls. Engraved likenesses are known in less than a dozen caves, painted likenesses only (as you will see) in Font-de-Gaume, in red; and, in black, in the new cave near Rouffignac (a few miles west of Lascaux), where the still-disputed paintings were discovered in 1956.

Here in Les Combarelles, hunched, sulky, malignant, you have in this creature an engraved image, once more, remarkably filled, filled out, fulfilled, with life. Yet this famous cave may leave you disappointed, may seem to you to be more archaeology or prehistoric zoology than art. The life of the best images of Les Combarelles is not in question; but disappointment may come partly from the nature of the lines engraved with such complexity on so rough a plate, and partly from the cave itself. Do you remember the faces upside down, the bodies walking among leaves, in puzzle-drawings in the annuals we enjoyed as children? The cavern of Les Combarelles at first repeats only that nursery experience without quite the same fascination. Mere disentanglement, in a cave which is poky, comfortless, and mediocre in its cavernous qualities, has to absorb so much of the spectator's willingness. At Les Combarelles we have our first real tussle with the enigmas of superimposition. At Lascaux not too much was overpainted, at Lascaux all — or so very much — was startling and coloured. Inside Les Combarelles old doubts, old questions about an antagonism between ritual art and our own concept of art recur, and can be answered only by the excellence of a



detected image. Don't be put off. Don't feel, after Les Combarelles, that you will never try another cave in which engravings predominate. After a while recognizing the engraved animals, grasping the engraved animals — *voici le museau*, and all the way round by the *arrière trait* to *le museau* again — does, I think, add to appreciation, does, cave by cave, give an increasing pleasure; concentrating surprise and delight over the tenderness, knowledge, and observation contained within these lines, which are gouged so firmly across the graininess and unevenness of the rock. At last you may have to swallow an earlier disappointment and dislike, and come back again — this was my experience — for new decipherment, new appreciation, inside Les Combarelles.

Font-de-Gaume and La Mouthe — they are different altogether. From its golden threshold, indeed from the first steps of the climb by a narrow path which crosses bare rock and flower-sprinkled scree under great furrowed, black-dribbled, backward-sloping cliffs of grey, Font-de-Gaume is more of a noble antrum. The climb leaves you hot and dry. The door of the cave is locked. The guide has not come up from his cottage on the road (the road back from Les Combarelles to Les Eyzies) or he is still inside delivering his recitation. Pleasant enough to rest here, as well; to cool off in the golden throat of this cave under the spotted shadows of a maple tree, on a ledge fifty feet above the little *font de Gaume*, the little stream trickling along to the river between this flattened, almost vertical hillside and the fields below. Beam-holes in the rock show that here also there was once a house or a barn or a shed, half artificial, half natural. The guide manifests himself, the door opens, he switches on the first light and hangs on the wall a bag into which he is to be 'remembered'. The cave goes along, rather than in; it runs parallel with the rock face and the valley underneath; and seventy yards or so from the doorway you come upon the first intimations of that grandeur which surprised Denis Peyrony, Henri Breuil, and Louis Capitan in 1901. Here are bison designed with more energy, more finesse than the few ungainly bison of Lascaux. A little further, and mammoths are painted on the wall; but they are ghost-bison and ghost-mammoths; further still, and suddenly, in front of your face, on the left-hand wall, you see all that is left of one of the master groups of palaeolithic art, the ghosts of the two reindeer in flirtation, the two reindeer head to head, the male stretching its head down and

forward from the great curve of its antlers to nose at the kneeling female. Look hard, follow your shepherd's wand, and recall the flaming sunset-cloud-colour of reproductions in book after book. Only the tender outline of the male's back and its two sweeping antlers are now to be traced in the original red and brown, and only hints of the kneeling doe. Look still harder. If you have your own torch (it pays always to carry a torch in these lighted caves, as strong and as direct in its beams as possible), shine the beam sideways on to the rock and follow the engraved lines of either head, since (as so often) these two animals were both engraved and painted.

This Font-de-Gaume, I have to admit, is one of the tired caves which have suffered from fifty years of display. It still teaches a good deal. Compare the mammoths and all that is left of the reindeer, and you see a clash between art and ritual, or between artist and motivation, you see how finely proportioned animals evoked all the skill and all the response of Magdalenian painters, how comically proportioned animals could defeat the natural dignity of their art. The mammoths, here as in other caves, trip absurdly along the limestone surface like aunts in their Sunday toques on their way to hear the rector. Yet in Font-de-Gaume colours have faded, names and dates have been scrawled over bison, over black pigment and red. In a cave so narrow, so short, rubbing, writing, and changes in atmosphere and temperature have done their damage until the paintings are as hard to interpret as the scraped and faded wall-paintings of a mediaeval church. Font-de-Gaume, I think, is now best explored in the plates, for all their shortcomings, in the folio record *La caverne de Font-de-Gaume* published by the discoverers, Louis Capitan, Abbé Breuil and Denis Peyrony, in 1910.

All the same, make the guide earn the remembrance you have to place in his bag: make him show you the red painting of the Woolly Rhinoceros, past a little iron gate in the final cleft, even though he exists only in a few faint red lines, devoid now of his original hairy hatching.

The fascination in La Mouthe is not, I confess, animals or art so much as the enigma of one single image far inside the cave. But La Mouthe itself, first of all; and its character. Each cave has its own character, even its own personality. Before I ever went to Lascaux





ABOVE. Lascaux: part of the frieze of the swimming deer. BELOW. Lascaux: cow in calf painted over horses.





or to Altamira I used to read descriptions and try — the descriptions did not help — to imagine the cave itself, and to imagine first of all the opening, or *entering*, of the cave, how it smiled or frowned or scowled, and the feeling it would give and in what circumstances of rock and trees and flowers and hillside and neighbourhood, frequentation or loneliness, the cave would introduce its own mystery. At La Mouthe, as at Les Combarelles, you have the intriguing contrast of mystery and frequentation. La Mouthe is up a narrow rough lane. You leave your car on the grass by the lane under acacia trees and walk for the guide, and then walk from the farmhouse to the cave. On this rolling plateau of vineyards, fields, and woods and green or brown lanes, just outside and above Les Eyzies, La Mouthe belongs to the farm and the family. It was and it remains the farmer's potato-cellar. It looks out over a *sauve* bowl of the farmer's plots of hay and corn and cabbage, among his woods. (Plate facing page 64.)

Unexpectedly you come to an arch of limestone, long and low and fairly smooth, above an opening like a crescent moon with its points in the ground. Ivy hangs brilliant green locks over the arch, and the crescent-opening is walled across, the wall pierced by a shabby wooden door and three lancets. There are stone seats outside the wall. A rusty plough sprawls between the wall and the ruins of a house alongside; and as you are guided into the gallery at the rear by a carbide lamp — no electricity in this farmer's cave — you see rows of endive pallidly emerging from a border of red earth against the rock.

Then cave and the Old Stone Age assert themselves. The floor is dry and even, but the cave comes low above your head. In the greenish light the original levels of the cave earth, or cave filling, which it took ten years to remove, are visible on either wall. The woman guide in her boots, who will be impatient if you stop too long, if you ask questions, if you persist in *looking*, holds up her lamp and reveals some of those first animals which clinched the genuineness of cave art more than fifty years ago. I admit the four bulls boldly engraved on the roof are bullish, active, intimidating, retaining and transmitting a prehistoric emotion (these are Aurignacian figures). I admit to the interest a little further on of two engraved Magdalenian reindeer in a brief side-alley, which have — or had, since the pigment is now very faint — a line each of red blobs from neck to tail. I admit to an historical excitement at one's own

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exploration of this cave which proved the antiquity of cave art, this cave in which Rivière also found a sandstone lamp, rather of Greek or Roman shape, fifty feet along the corridor, with traces in the bowl of carbonized animal fat and with an ibex rather beautifully engraved on the bottom.<sup>1</sup> But here it is the Enigma which counts; and at last it comes, a hundred and twenty yards inside this small, dry, claustrophobic and not so very cavernous cavern; at last you see the engraving and painting combined, more than two feet six inches high, of what appears to be a triangular hut or shelter. Animals are animals. Their enigma is *why?* — not one of their identity. But this? These coloured bands and engraved lines sweeping down from a ridge? If they make a hut, then why a hut painted in colours, which are now faint red and black and warm brown, over an engraved medley of hardly decipherable creatures?

This is the moment to wield the word 'tectiform'. When the young Breuil and his friends explored Font-de-Gaume in 1901 they were puzzled by shapes on the rock near or actually on paintings of mammoth and bison. There were more of these shapes, some engraved, others painted, in Les Combarelles, others again with mammoths in a cave I have not mentioned, Bernifal, not far from Les Combarelles in the woods up the valley of the larger Beune, a cave explored by Denis Peyrony in 1902. Were they huts, were they traps? Huts, thought the Abbé Breuil, since they seemed to show a sloping roof and a central pole. So he fashioned the word 'tectiform', to indicate at least that they had the form of a house or roof; and when other more or less geometric shapes, not at all the same, were found in other caves, 'tectiform' conveniently covered them all.

It was this other rectangular and triangular shape or painted object observed here in La Mouthe by Emile Rivière who took it to be a hut of some kind, which launched the notion of 'tectiform' for shapes, different as they might be, in other caves. I think there is no doubt that most tectiforms are one kind or another of trap. The ones with 'roof' and centre-pole are associated only with heavy animals, bison or mammoth, and are probably fall-traps, made of logs, perhaps combined with springs in such a way that the roof collapsed and the sides fell outwards and the animal tumbled on to upright stakes which pierced its belly. Other tectiforms may be simple rectangular pits roofed over, others again palisaded alleyways

<sup>1</sup> Ibex are also engraved on the walls of La Mouthe.



into which animals were driven; others are likely to be 'tread-traps' — canoe-shaped or rectangular contraptions of wood in which bent saplings forced shutters or wooden jaws together, when animals triggered them. These tread-traps are known in Europe from actual specimens modern, mediaeval, and prehistoric, as far back as the Bronze Age, and were set to catch red deer by their watering-places. Tread-trap tectiforms are commonest in Spanish caves, in red deer country.

Scratch an archaeologist, though, and you find underneath a spinner of romance. A German prehistorian interpreted the tectiforms as traps, but traps for evil spirits, not animals. Abbé Breuil likes to think that 'tectiforms' and the animals near them, in them, or below them on the cave walls are of different dates and have nothing to do with each other (but if your artist paints his animal on the rock, why shouldn't he, or someone else later on, hopefully paint a trap on top of the animal — or vice-versa?); he still likes to see in the tectiform a real hut, and out of the hut he makes a soul-house, a home in the cave for ancestral spirits. In fairness, it should be admitted that the spirits of the dead are quite commonly supposed to dwell in caves, that the ancestral spirits of some tribes in Australia live in caves in perpetual sunshine. But why should these palaeolithic ancestor spirits need a house inside a house? Why should they inhabit wall houses in caves which seem to have had the function of special storehouses of animal life, of bison life and mammoth life, special shrines for increase and good hunting? Mightn't one, as well, as reasonably, interpret spears entering a prehistoric painted animal as anything in the wide world except the spears they obviously are? And didn't English antiquaries once think that every Bronze Age axe was a Druid's hatchet for the ceremonial cutting of mistletoe?

Yet this hut so far inside La Mouthe? This hut, which is so hut-like, so different from other tectiforms, and all the same so entirely tectiformed? Was it, Abbé Breuil asks romantically, 'a kind of tabernacle housing the spirit which presided over the game, and its multiplication, and the hunt?' Perhaps. Or perhaps, hut-like or no, it was only another trap for the creatures on the wall — and the archaeologists in the cave.

You emerge again from La Mouthe into the sun, and the Enigma remains enigmatic. Yet two minutes after leaving the cave, in these farm lands of La Mouthe, I saw a hut, just such a triangular hut, as

though it had slipped ahead of me out of the darkness into the shelter of the living ilex trees, out of prehistory into present.

I looked inside. It was used for shelter, for chopping wood, for storing tools. The ridge-stick stretched from a fork in an ilex to a pair of crossed poles, the combination of side and roof was a simple frame of straight poles tied with withies, the thatch was simply bundles of *bruyère* and of dry sunflower stems. The far end was apsidal (as the far end of the hut in the cave might have been). The open end, or doorway end, was closed in slightly, on either side. Again and again I have seen such field huts in the Dordogne or Lot, in the cave country, some using a tree, most of them standing on their own, all of the same straightforward pattern, though now and again the sloping side-poles would be set on stones to save them from the damp earth. (Plates facing page 49.)

Hut or trap in the cave of La Mouthe? A god's hut? A man's trap? As well when you leave La Mouthe to end the day for once with an enigma, and not with the images of art. And there are enigmas to come, especially the enigma of the silhouetted hands.



## VI

### Milk and Apricots

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SOME CAVES, in defiance of the raw weather of the Old Stone Age, I associate with particular flowers — the cave of Les Trois Frères with cherry blossom and a large cranesbill of the Petites Pyrénées sprawling in its shadowy entrance, Niaux with wild lavender beside the loose stones of the path up the mountain, Labastide with Welsh Poppies and Dusky Cranesbill, the caves of the Sacred Hill of Castillo with the deepest, most precious, luminous blue of *Lithospermum*, Pindal above the slap of the sea with blue columbines (as at King Arthur's Cave on the Wye), and tutsan and Pyrenean Lilies dripping in the Cantabrian drizzle.

The two caves of this chapter, plunging more into the unfamiliar, are Pech-Merle and Cougnac. Round Pech-Merle the hot limestone nourishes little box trees or box shrubs, ripe strawberries more brilliant than the red ochre of any cave painting, and cascades of *Saponaria ocymoides*, the small pink soapwort we grow in English rock-gardens. Cougnac — but we are not there yet, we have hardly left the Dordogne, the Vézère, Les Eyzies or Montignac, and the rather soiled, if still exciting caves now trodden by so many feet. It is no enormous journey. Cougnac, most innocent of caverns, is in the department of the Lot next door, the department of the next of those rivers which wriggle across France into the Gironde. Down the road named N 704, south-east of the smallish, not very interesting town of Sarlat, you cross the Dordogne by a concrete bridge which carefully conceals water and rock and the view up river or down. Three miles and you are inside the next department. The country has not changed a great deal. By valleys and along streams and under walls of rock you come quickly within sight of Gourdon, which again is simply a town, by a road.

Early in the fifties I was ambling along this by-road towards Gourdon and towards Route Nationale 20 in search of Pech-Merle. From Sarlat to Pech-Merle it was forty-five or forty-six miles, and I knew of no particular cave between the Dordogne and the Lot, or

rather its tributary the Célé, which flows through Cabrerets and nearer to Pech-Merle. There ahead was Gourdon, there ahead were its roofs and its church towers capping a hill; when a new, insistent, unfaded notice pointed left to a *grotte préhistorique* which was certainly in no guidebook or handbook of archaeology. I turned, and it was like coming to a quarry, for the cave, or caves, of Cougnac were still in the trials of being *amenagé*. They had now blasted the limestone outside, they had hewn it back to a yellow freshness, they were building steps, the guide sat in a temporary tin hut like a workmen's *pissoir*. As we walked from the yellow gullet of the first cave, which is *richement décorée de stalagmites*, to the second cave with its new promise of *peintures parietales*, I noticed Cougnac's flower, which was not innocent at all like the *Saponaria ocymoides* over the grey rock of Pech-Merle. No, an altogether unlikely *spear* thrust itself out of the dry leaves in a thin wood of ilex. This spear was violet and steel-blue, naked, thick and strong. I had never seen it before, this steel-blue and violet orchid, this *Limodorum abortivum*, this parasitical 'spear of hunger', with flowers — the top ones were just opening — which were also violet with yellow. It joins itself root by root to the trees, a threatening plant and a better symbol for the coloured gloom and bigness and strangeness of Pech-Merle than for the show of innocence which glittered somewhere below this path, this ridge and these ilex trees.

A potato-cellar, another one, grilled with iron and locked, came into view directly below a modern, almost Parisian — almost suburbanly Parisian — house, which was built across the ridge.

At the back of this cellar — the guide was now unlocking the grille — a draught had long been felt between the rock and the earth. Explorers followed the draught, they dug out the earth, they discovered step by step, spadeful by spadeful, a cave corridor not unlike the one which is the whole of the cavern of La Mouthe. It sloped downward, then of a sudden (the explorers stepped inside, first of all, in November, 1952) it opened to a gleaming, crystalline, pure fantasy of whiteness. Here, then, after a dark and dirty downward walk, not many yards long, you find yourself under radiating ceilings of fine white stalactites, and at last in a hall which seems nearly circular; which is more intricate and more fantastic and more



rich — allowing for the absence of colour — than any room in the Prince Regent's pavilion in Brighton.

In this sparkling fascination, in this improbable set, you find the drawings. They are quite unlike drawings in the caves of the Vézère. To begin with, they include different animals. The guide — he is still an enthusiast, not too bored yet or blasé or worn smooth with repetition about the cave and its contents, though nowadays the *aménagement* is much more complete and a cloth streamer flaunts across the road to announce the caves — the guide stoops, he switches on another light illuminating still more clearly a portion of the wall free of calcite and formations, and the light reveals a line of red ochre, gently and fluently enclosing a large deer, which raises, in what the Abbé Breuil calls 'twisted perspective', two very large palmated antlers.

'Twisted perspective' the Abbé Breuil takes to be a sign of early draughtsmanship; an animal stands sideways to the spectator or creator, its horns or antlers show full and double — in other words, the artist emphasizes, at the cost of a superficial, literal accuracy which does not concern him, one of the animal's most obvious characteristics, which would be revealed best in nature or 'fact' if the animal were to turn its head. Plenty of the animals of Lascaux, Font-de-Gaume, Les Combarelles, and La Mouthe are drawn with horns, but not head, swung around in this way; which belongs, generally, to the art of Aurignacian and Gravettian times.

A peculiar, an extra peculiar animal, this one in Cougnac; in red line upon a ground of pale yellow limestone, a creature hardly to be seen in other caves — a *Cervus megaceros*, or Giant Deer. And next to it, also in red line, a peculiar elephant, one of several in this cave which are smooth, innocent of long shaggy hairs and humps and humpy heads and enormous curling tusks; one of several which are not mammoths of the cold and of the steppes and the tundra, but examples of *Elephas antiquus*. The Giant Deer and this Wood Elephant were both woodland animals, had both been familiar to Neanderthal Man before the onset of the Last Glaciation, and they survived here in the south of France (and in the north of Spain, where this Wood Elephant is pictured also in Castillo and Pindal) as long as the climate and a leafy environment allowed — long enough at any rate to be hunted by the Aurignacians and to be drawn in this white cave by Aurignacian artists — much as in Lascaux the

surviving Merck's Rhinoceros, predecessor of the Woolly Rhinoceros, survived long enough to be drawn at the bottom of the well either by an Aurignacian (probably) or a Gravettian.

Peculiarity in Cougnac does not end with the identity of these two creatures, for delineated within the red boundaries of the Giant Deer and the red boundaries of the tall elephant the light also reveals two sprawling or spread-eagling mannikins. On the Giant Deer the man staggers forward, drawn in a black line contrasting with the red outline of the animal. He is a mere indication, without feet, without head, without arms, but with three spears, or three light javelins, bending in his back and his backside. In the red elephant the mannikin, also sketched in black, with a head, but minus arms or feet, falls forward under the stroke of two javelins along his spine and a javelin in his buttock and four javelins in his belly. And there is a third man in brownish line, javelined, falling, beaked as if he were a bird or wore a bird mask. More enigmas. Are we looking, it has been asked, at the neutralization of three evil spirits? At three men to whom hunting magic is applied as to other animals, men for once who are no less game and good eating? Men of Neanderthal race (though both particular and universal) surviving no less than Giant Deer and Wood Elephant, hunted, killed, perhaps devoured, and desired again, by the Aurignacian *Homo sapiens*, newly arrived in western Europe? (Plate facing page 96.)

Who can answer? And in the white lyricism of this cave, in all this delicate solidification of milk, there are more animals, there are ibex tensely delineated in red, one with a red *museau*, there are curious 'tectiforms' (in a gallery to the left) of straight lines and right angles; and curious finger patterns — positives, which are rare — in red and in black.

How long, I ask myself, will Cougnac stay so fresh, and so virginal? Lighting is installed, visitors come and go, floors are churned up, the stalactites which hang like a frozen rain of milk are broken or touched, the white walls are fingered, human breath floats through the cave, air blows down the entrance. How long shall we be able to feel in this cave a delicate, filamental magic or wonder, as though, after paying for our tickets and filing down the dirty narrow entrance passage, we were still the first ever to have entered since the cave was known to Aurignacian draughtsmen or initiates or medicine-men of high degree? (Plate facing page 81.)



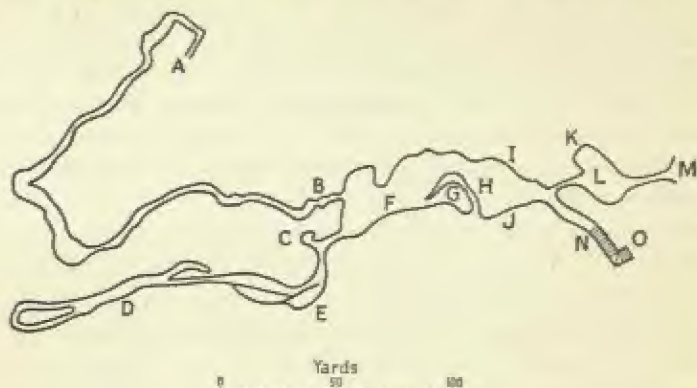
Meanwhile in Cougnac one feels a purity or primacy of human consciousness, which is to be experienced elsewhere, I think, only in some of the Spanish caverns along the Cantabrian Sea.

Inside Pech-Merle, thirty miles on, in a much fiercer, rockier, sharper, more broken, more heated and empty countryside, these questions hardly occur, for while Cougnac is delicate and intimate and white, Pech-Merle is strong, deep-coloured, dramatic, enormous, one of the few painted caves of the dimensions of a cathedral.

When the young parish priest of the village of Cabrerets saw the paintings in this cave for the first time in 1920, he had travelled a long way underneath the rough hill of Pech-Merle, which he had entered in a spot 'of desert aspect, through a slit hidden by the shrubs and the stunted oaks which compete for life in those few centimetres of earth which scarcely cover the jags and ridges of our limestone'. His description stands well for this district of the Causses du Lot through which one drives to Pech-Merle. The Causses are limestone plateaux, limestone deserts, grimmest of all on either side of the Tarn further east. Here the Causses resemble a Derbyshire gone back to scrub, with the green grass burnt or browned away. Rock protrudes, rock falls into scree, rocks are piled loosely up to enclose the fields. A small grey house here and there is tiled in red or orange, but it is a grey environment otherwise, and a dry one. All this upland world is dry. Dry, creased old women drive a few sheep from open juniper patch to patch. The sheep are lean and dry and tall, black ears drooping over a black patch around the eye. Each flock has a goat rattling a dry bell to frighten off the devil. The valleys get wilder, the walls vanish, oak scrub mixes with box on the steep sides, and *Geranium sanguineum*, Bloody Cranesbill, sign of all limestone country from Spain to Yorkshire and the Gower, gleams to the grateful eye from boulders and heartless interminable outcrops.

Pech-Merle, the hill, rises from such a landscape above a tributary of the Célé named the Sagne, from whose rocks I picked the belying innocence of that small pink cascading soapwort. Once, inside the hill in 1920, the *curé* had to walk, creep, crawl, clamber, and descend four hundred and fifty yards from his savage entrance to the paintings. Nowadays a road curls up from the Sagne, and one enters more directly through a concrete hall and a café, past a counter for guidebooks and souvenirs, and down a staircase. This modern

portal, in fact, is probably nearer the entrance used in the Old Stone Age, which is thought to have been through the neighbouring brief cave of Marcenac, now choked with formations from wall to wall. The change hardly matters. Modern entrance or no, the facts of



2. Plan of Pech-Merle

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|---|--|
| A. Natural entrance (by which the cave was explored in 1920 and 1922) | H. Gallery of the Paintings, 456 yards from A. |
| B. Steep and difficult descent  | I. Panel of the Horses and the Hands           |
| C. Hall of the Human Footprints                                       | J. Chapel of the Mammoths                      |
| D. Gallery of the Bear  | K. Engraving of <i>Cervus megaceros</i>        |
| E. The Tribune  | L. Ossuary of the Bears                        |
| F. Hall of the Roof Scrawls   | M. Access to new galleries                     |
| G. The Corniche   | N. Artificial entrance passage                 |
|   | O. Modern entrance                             |

cavernity are still almost immediately overwhelming. Down one goes, and down — not merely *in*. Lights flash on, and call areas of shape and colour out of unknown depths and extensions of cathedral gloom, and point a way to crypts and to vaultings, to lower levels and still higher ceilings.

A cathedral: inside this cathedral I have felt — forgetting companions I had never met and guides and steps and tickets, and counters and Coca-Cola and a car park under the dry trees — as if I had entered Ely Cathedral by the Octagon, and as if I were making my roundabout secret way by clerestory gallery, by passages between the walls and in the walls, by openings, and by newels,



past Gothic stalactites and diaper work and mouldings and stony foliage, down at last, knees a little weak, to the choir and the presbytery and the chantries and the Galilee and the extravagant Lady Chapel.

The art, though, of Pech-Merle? No, this cave counts more as setting, as itself, as the frame of its drawings and paintings and engravings; less for the art, more for its shapes and formations, its solid flows and solid cascades, its rope-like stalactites, water-worn wavy passages, pillars, bosses, mamillary projections; all of which, again, count only because they so much enshrine the essence of ancient man. You can buy in any stationer's in France an excellent, annotated map of the French caves and pot-holes and gorges, you can visit natural wonders until you are sick of them, but it is another thing in this reliquary of a cave when you stand on the unlit gallery or balcony or platform of the 'Corniche', and wait; and wait until a light goes on thirty or forty feet below, and you stare down, between columns of a pale tinned-apricot colour to a leaf of rock standing vertically on the floor and painted with the two nearly life-sized or modern-pony-sized wild horses of this 'Grotte-Temple', as it was named by its clerical explorer and encomiast. No amount of *aménagement*, no chatterment of the guide or guided, can spoil that sudden revelation. The two horses stand there reversed, heads pointing different ways, rump superimposed over rump, their bodies outlined and spotted with a black manganese paint. The manganese gives them a slightly blue look. Hands also have been stencilled on the leaf of rock (I use 'leaf' as one would use it of a table), above and below and to the side of the horses; also with manganese. The spots of bluish-black not only fill the body-areas of each horse, but are ranged along the legs and bellies. There are livelier, fierier horses in the French caves, in Lascaux, for example. There are horses better designed, as though they had galloped that moment from the steppe into the cave, shaggy, sultry, and Mongolian; but there are no horses better placed, none more in command of a cave (except the red mare of Labastide); indeed the horses of Pech-Merle, so deep in this enormous underground nave, impart, I would say, a supreme pleasurable ineffaceable shock of great voltage to the historical imagination. Out of the darkness an Aurignacian or Gravettian javelin all of a sudden hits and quivers in the mind. (Plate facing page 97.)

The horses are supported in Pech-Merle less by art than oddities — by the roots descending like beards of silence and inquisition from the exterior world, by pisoliths or cave pearls on the floor, by the hardened, naked footprints of grown-ups and a twelve-year-old child who came in to visit the animals of Pech-Merle upon some occasion many thousands of years ago.

As for man's other purposive marks, here for the first time you see more or less the whole earliest range of the first Aurignacian and Gravettian cycle which the Abbé Breuil has postulated. Here you see from the most ancient of times, the finger scrawlings or the 'macaroni' scrawls, *drawn*, literally, by *drawing* the fingers along the clay of the roof, which the scrawlers reached by climbing on to boulders which had fallen long ago across the cave. They drew animals and women, they drew figures approximate to the slain mannikins of Cougnac; on top of a scrawled mammoth, for example, they fingered a woman who seems to have her hair tied back, whose long breasts swing in one direction and whose steatopygous behind projects in the other; she stands on her heels, her body forward in the ritual attitude of the dancer. The mammoths are more elephantine, but the women already show that indifferent approximation, that mere symbolism of human shape which was generally enough for palaeolithic artists. They were concerned far more tenderly and totally for the mammoths, horses, ibex, oxen, bison, and reindeer and red deer who shared their world with them, than for themselves.

There are wall drawings of a later time in this huge nave. On the leaf of the manganese horses you can see also a long red fish and a bull bison. On panels of pale rock at a higher level, tolerably smooth, there are drawings in black line of bison and mammoths and oxen — what is called, for example, the *charge de bisons*, two black-lined bison on the pale yellow, smooth ground, suggesting less a charge than a bull bison about to copulate, about to mount his cow, with no preliminary of flirtation, his pizzle at the tilt, his tail keyed up. The cow in front of him (bull is slightly imposed over cow, in X-ray drawing) rears up her willing hindquarters; also, but less tensely though no less suggestively, rearing her tail. Mammoths on this panel of rock trail their long hairs as though they were swayed by a glacial wind; and look, as they do so often, slightly comic.

How does all this handiwork go in sequence of names and cultures and industries in Pech-Merle? The macaroni drawings,



finger draggings or scrawlings, most of the hands stencilled with a surround of black or red (I shall have more to say of the Cave Hands when I describe the Temple of the Hands at Gargas) — these, as I have mentioned, are Aurignacian. The manganese horses — late Aurignacian or Gravettian — and the black drawings, or painted drawings, in outline, are late Gravettian or early Magdalenian. But again we have to remember, when these easy words are employed, how we squash into them vast lengths of time, vast stretches of the vague years handled as lightly as astronomical distances. Also, to talk too much of Pech-Merle as a cathedral, even as a cave-temple, would be misleading in several ways. Intermittently, over great lengths of time, men came into Pech-Merle, drew, painted, engraved, visited and revisited these images; but this was no such frequented metropolitan cave as Lascaux must have been, or Altamira. It was a lesser shrine for an area more thinly inhabited and less hospitable. All the same, of the known caves of art I repeat it is this frame of Pech-Merle around the blue horses which imparts the keenest shock of wonder that man in the hop, skip, jump, lag, and jump again of the development of his ideas, could have been an artist so long ago.

Observe also one detail I should have mentioned — how the painting of the manganese horses was perhaps suggested by the shape of the end of the leaf of rock, which is not unlike a horse's head and which the artist actually made into a head with the help of his manganese pigment and a line of ochre. Remember Leonardo — 'Do not despise my opinion, when I remind you that it should not be hard for you to stop sometimes and look into the stains of walls, or ashes of a fire, or clouds, or mud, or like places, in which, if you consider them well, you may find really marvellous ideas.' Frequently in the caverns, a line, a shape, a ledge, a fault, a crack, a bulge in the rock caught the eye of the Old Stone Age artist by its suggestion of head, back, belly, leg, rump, or special volume of some one of the species of animal, the species of game, he loved. Frequently he added with his own hand the rest of that hinted animal — a proceeding no more and no less primitive for him than for sophisticated Leonardo or for ourselves as, from our beds, we stare up and discern men, faces, events, actions and encounters, in the cracks of the plaster.

From Leonardo we could also borrow a test applicable to drawing

after drawing in the caves, Aurignacian to late Magdalenian: 'That figure is most worthy of praise', Leonardo put down, 'which by its action best expresses the passion which animates it.'

At Cabrerets, afterwards, down by the Célé, if you dine through a long evening on the river terrace of the small clean Hotel des Grottes, another artist is called to mind. Look across from your white tablecloth to a cliff on the other side of the water, so clear in the reflected light that you could touch it: the cliff, the light, the clarity, the palpability, are out of an oil, once more, by Gustave Courbet, the Master of the Limestone (though Courbet's limestone country, around Ornans, was far off against the Swiss border, beyond Solutr  and the cliff-fall of the horses, near the Alpine glaciers of the Ice Age). Here, as you eat so well above the C   , the trees in front of you, the rocks, under the increasing violet of the sky, acquire an extraordinary third-dimensional depth, as if you were looking through a stereoscope. It gets nearly dark, a white dog comes down a lane slanting across the rocks, on the other side. The curve of its tail is visible, is still distinct and taut. Then a woman in black follows her dog and walks across and down through the stereoscope, distinct as the dog, distinct as the rocks and the leaves; then a man, following his dog and his wife, with a red (clearly red) handkerchief hanging out of his pocket, and over his shoulder a long faggot which droops behind him, the twigs of it also clear, like a tail, or like the long black hairs of the mammoth now enjoying the nightly absence of visitors inside Pech-Merle. On the violet water below the terrace the trees are reflected now in a green which is darker than themselves.

Much here of a Courbet landscape, of the essence of evening limestone. And in five minutes all will be lost in darkness. (Plate facing page 112.)

Cabrerets has other pleasures, the strawberries you have eaten, as if at Cheddar, the small excellent cheeses of goat's milk, very mild, which lie on the table. Also a small museum, furnished from the caves, and a few minor caves within reach. Upstream under the river cliffs, so much loftier, wilder, more broken, more coloured (tinned apricot, too, like the inside of Pech-Merle) than the cliffs along the Vezere, I have been drawn to the brief cavern at Ste Eulalie, sixteen



miles away, and then thirty or forty feet above the road and river past the church and opposite one of the many mills which the Célé has to revolve. I do not say this is much of a cave (you find it walled, but not locked, directly above a garden with an iron cross), but I enjoy taking my own time, for a change, without a guide chanting . . . *le museau, les yeux, les oreilles*. Look for the engravings (only engravings here) on the left side, which was the sun-illuminated side for the engraver twelve thousand years ago, and if you cannot find the full complement of reindeer and wild horses, all near the entrance, it is hard to miss two engraved late Magdalenian reindeer. And with what a firm sensitivity their engraved outline still ploughs across the rock!

Below Ste Eulalie I have bathed and cooled myself in the dark Célé, by a farm ford, slept after veal and cheese and strawberries and wine in a poplar grove to the music again of orioles; then climbed from the Célé across and down to the Lot, climbed again from the Lot through the cliff-hung village of St Cirq Lapopie, and moved across a *causse* plateau towards Montauban (where the museum is full of Ingres), and Toulouse, and the southernmost country of the French caves.

## VII

### The Sculptors

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THEY WERE SCULPTORS as well. *Klaxonnez et attendez dix minutes.* Sound your horn and wait ten minutes — and fifteen minutes — and twenty minutes, and then, as if he had just finished milking his last cow, the *gardien* comes down from his farm on the hill, ready to display the frieze of the rock-shelter of Cap Blanc.

The situation is not forward upon our march to the south, towards Toulouse and the Pyrenees. It is back — it is back once more near Les Eyzies, near Les Combarelles and Bernifal of two chapters ago. Beyond Les Combarelles the Beune (which runs, you will remember, into the Vézère at Les Eyzies) divides in two, each branch with its own vale of strata and declivities. Just after Les Combarelles the road bends to the right and enters the valley of the greater Beune, which takes it towards Sarlat. Below silvery hazel woods alongside this road and this larger of the two streams the cavern of Bernifal hides its mammoths and its tectiforms. Before you reach as far up the valley, a turn to the left, a quarter of a mile from Les Combarelles, brings you between woods and rock into the rushy, flaggy, now rather neglected fields of the smaller Beune, running eastward into sunshine. The road soon crosses the stream, soon climbs and twists and levels out above the rocks of Cap Blanc, which are invisible from the road itself. The sun heats and cooks the thin scrub, through which the *gardien*, as dry as any juniper stem and as communicative, if not as prickly, shambles down with his key and his patter.

Here at Cap Blanc in 1909 they learned that Upper Palaeolithic Man practised yet another art with a great deal more than dexterity. He painted, yes; he engraved, he was a good draughtsman. He would incise animals along the stems of his strange *bâtons-de-commandement* (often colouring such engravings); he would carve bird or beast as finial to a spear-thrower. He even carved small figures in the round. Several of these Venus figures cut from mammoth ivory or from stone by the Gravettians were familiar, even famous, by this time. One, called *La Paire*, the Pear, from her full thighs and belly,









had been dug out of the Grotte du Pape at Brassempouy in Landes as long ago as 1892. Others came out of the red rock caverns above the sea at Grimaldi in 1897. Venuses were already known from the Ukraine, and the Venus of Willendorf, rather a German than an Austrian Venus, faceless, clasping her enormous breasts above her enormous belly, had been extracted from under the loess of a cave in Lower Austria in 1908, the year before the first intimations of Cap Blanc. Earliest found of all, more shapely and elegant than the bellied and breasted women of the Gravettians, archaeologists also had long known the armless, headless, footless Magdalenian 'Venus impudica', in ivory, from the cave-shelter at Laugerie Basse.

Small figures seem only bric-à-brac. This 'Venus impudica' is no more than three and a quarter inches long. The Venus of Willendorf is not quite four inches long and lies comfortably in the palm of the hand.

The moment, or the situation in time, requires more introduction before we get to Cap Blanc. After all of the finds along the Vézère, after rock-shelters had been excavated, after La Mouthe and the rehabilitation of Altamira; after the revelations of Les Combarelles, Bernifal, and Font-de-Gaume, all within a few miles, it was natural enough to explore the higher reaches of the Beune and to ask the silent frowning solemn overhangs of rock along the sunny northern flank of the valley what they might be concealing. A little beyond the notice of *klaxonnez et attendez dix minutes* the château of Laussel rides the abrupt edge of its own cliff. It was Dr Lalanne, a scientist and physician enthusiastic for the new antiquities, who owned this estate. Anxious for discoveries on his own property he set workmen digging below the château under a long outward bulge; and where his land came to an end at the white escarpment of Cap Blanc below the road, another *abri*, another rock-shelter fifty feet long, looked inviting.

Trial digs along the terrace below this escarpment were rewarded quickly with bones of reindeer and red deer and horse, and with a *bâton-de-commandement* carved at one end with a human foot showing four toes and even the toe-nails. The labourers came upon large flint tools and large stones which might have been wielded like a maul. It seemed that the terrace along the escarpment had been paved in a rough manner.

In the course of years by the thousand, frost has often damaged

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*Opposite.* Pech-Merle: Hands and Horses.

these fluted bulges or overhangs along the valleys of the Dordogne. Pieces of rock have flaked and fallen and have disappeared in due time under the talus. At Cap Blanc several pieces uncovered in these first excavations had broken away like that. Dr Lalanne's foreman turned one piece over, and found to his excitement and surprise a bison cut on the other side in relief. He examined the escarpment, he noticed at the modern ground level incisions along the rock; he took a piece of board and gently scraped away the crust of earth — and sculpture, from that moment, took upon itself a new antiquity.

The incisions were part of the back contour of a horse from neck to tail. As the earth was removed, horse after horse entered the daylight again. Some were six feet from head to tail, others were larger still, more than thirteen feet long; all were damaged by the wear of time; they were incomplete, yet they were carved to a far from shallow depth, they were delineated firmly and without blurring, they were filled indeed with a grandeur of existence which was yet the existence of horses entirely, and not of ideas about horses, either literal or heroic.

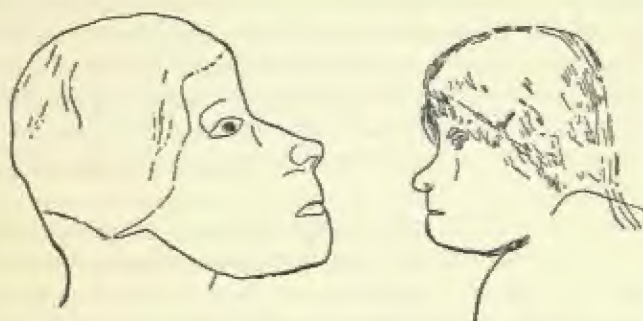
So the Magdalenians — the seven horses along the rock were dated as Early Magdalenian art by the excavations — made not only drawings or paintings by feeble light in damp caves, they made Parthenon friezes out in the sunshine. More than life-sized, they carved across the sun-flooded rock above their shelters horse following horse, they raised sculpture altogether from the level of amulet, ornament, or bric-à-brac; and these beasts had been coloured, no less than the sculpture of the Egyptians or the Greeks. When the earth was taken away, one of the largest of the horses still showed traces of reddish or purple colouring on its neck and its head.<sup>1</sup> Only one thing went wrong — it seemed that the frieze continued along the rock from Dr Lalanne's estate into his neighbour's: the neighbour would allow no digging across his boundary and would not budge.

Yet what the workmen had revealed was startling enough. The Abbé Breuil was summoned: he looked, and marvelled and described, he was there in the evening and there at sunrise, to discover in which light the sculptures looked their best. He reported without exaggeration that they 'were not just natural swellings on the rock

<sup>1</sup> No doubt the small Gravettian figures were coloured. There were hints of pink colouring on the Venus of Willendorf, for example.



intensified, they were not just cleverly and painfully carved from a projecting cornice. No! The Magdalenian artist attacked a huge plane surface, overhanging at one end, vertical at the other. With his flint tools he cut away the rock for widths of four to twenty inches; and he scraped the silhouette in relief, modelling the projection of the back and the muscles, and marking the attachment of



*Two heads, from Grotte de la Marche*

limbs and sinews; and no doubt he finished off this massive work of his with the most delicately incised lines'.

Nowadays at Cap Blanc you are introduced to a National Monument. You follow the *gardien* from the road across grey rock and red earth between oaks and junipers, seeing also with curiosity a great castle, rising tier after tier in ruins on the other side of the valley. You descend by an easy slope from the road, you come to a natural lawn, to a natural glade between cliff and thin acacia trees. The horses of Cap Blanc — these wild horses — are stalled and stabled, alas. Under the natural wall, under the lean-over of rock, appears a brick building squashed into the cliff, and the *gardien* unlocks the door at the narrow end, and there, inside a darkish tunnel, the eye must accommodate itself as best it may and discern the horses. The *gardien* wiggles his stick around volumes, ears, tail. The *gardien* utters his expressionless piece. Alas, since the horses can no longer be seen by the strong light and the strong shadows and the full contours of day, it is now scarcely possible to grasp the frieze as one extending motif from the far end of the rock-shelter up to the doorway. You can realize, all the same, that the tender, strong, precise

command of outline and of volume in these Magdalenian carvings is no less maintained than the command of line in the better Magdalenian paintings or engravings. You can realize that the sculptor, again, *knew* the horses, which he and his companions trapped and stampeded to death, no doubt over the cliffs of this valley. But he did not know them only falling and squealing, their legs in the air (as in that one of the paintings at Lascaux), and then crashing, and becoming a mess of hide and flesh and broken bones quivering upon the ground; he had watched these horses, he had watched horses close to, himself hidden; he had watched horse following horse in file, stallion following mare; he had watched horses in typical stance, head down and slightly forward, like the huge horse, far the best preserved, which for a while after the excavation still retained a little of its colour.

The sculptor had not solved every problem of his design. When Magdalenian artists depicted animals walking in file on a flat surface or when they engraved animals in file along a *bâton-de-commandement*, an overlap — head upon flank, for example — such as they must often have seen, caused them no difficulty at all. But in relief as high, or deep, as at Cap Blanc, it was another matter. The solution would have been either to cut very much shallower, as the Greeks were to do along a temple frieze, or else to cut very much more deeply, so that the thickness of rock would allow for the proper thickness of the head raised upon the proper thickness of the flank. No, the sculptor of Cap Blanc arranged animal following animal along the same depth more or less, cutting away the volumes of the flank round the volumes of the head. Afterwards, though, he perhaps corrected this un-naturalism with the deceptive aid of pigments. Still, how remarkable, how insistent, how true and convincing these horses must have looked on bare rock, unshaded by leaf or root or hanging ivy, solid, and startlingly defined by red ochre or black manganese, visible from many points up and down the valley. (Plates facing page 113.)

Dr Lalanne had not finished. Not long after the horses (together with a trace or two of other animals) had been completely excavated, he began to come upon carvings underneath the long overhanging cliff up by the château of Laussel — first of all, the relief of the two copulating humans on a loose piece of stone, flat, more or less oval, about eighteen inches by twelve. The archaeologists saw at once a



relation between the long-breasted female in this partnership and the little statues from Brassempouy, Grimaldi, and Willendorf. The relationship was still more vivid in the next figures Lalanne unearthed along the shelter, the Venus reliefs, so remarkably like the Venus of Willendorf, two of them on smallish slabs, the other, the Venus of Laussel, who holds the bison horn in her right hand, carved on a huge immovable lump of stone (from which she was sawn and despatched to Paris). All of these figures belonged apparently to a single shrine; and again this Venus of Laussel (no doubt the other carvings, too) had been finished off, I repeat, with red ochre. Another relief depicts a graceful man. Most of his arms are broken away, though his attitude suggests he might well be throwing a spear at a horse or a bison with his spear-thrower. In addition to these major pieces Laussel also yielded scraps of rock bearing reliefs (as at Sergeac) of conventionalized female privates.

Evidently man had used this shelter for thousands of years. It runs along beneath the bulge of the cliff for more than a hundred and twenty yards, layered with remains of occupation after occupation, Dr Lalanne having come upon his reliefs in a Gravettian layer a few feet below the rough bouldery surface. So in a brief length of this one valley late sculpture and early sculpture were revealed, deep carving and shallow cutting, an art of refined boldness and an art, an earlier one, altogether more rough and ready, with less of the power which comes from graceful form or outline.

Two actual caves in this valley of the lesser Beune also ask for notice — as well as that castle rising tier by tier opposite Cap Blanc. At Laussel, *in situ*, there is nothing to see any more except the shelter itself; but if you ask the *gardien* of Cap Blanc to show you the cavern of La Grèze (named after the hamlet in which he lives), you can carry the art of this exceptional valley back into another era. This small cave on the other side of the road from Cap Blanc contains one large, stiff, aesthetically dull, archaeologically important engraving of a bison, low down near the floor. He is Aurignacian, pre-Gravettian, earlier by far than the horses of Cap Blanc, earlier than the fertility females of Laussel — a bull-bison in profile, displaying tail and member and one leg for each pair of legs, and the two horns, which are, again, twisted round out of the sideways view. Rather a tantalizing cavern, this small one of La Grèze, under a low arch,

behind a wall and a door. At the back a passage starts away through the rock, or so it seems, filled up with earth, never cleared, never explored, and suggesting that sixty, eighty, a hundred, or two hundred yards away inside the hill, there may, for all one knows, be another Lascaux, another Altamira, its paintings still glowing and unsullied.

Commarque — that is the castle; the great yellow ruin perched on the southern, opposite side of the valley, its towers, turrets, battlements, wearing a garment of oak trees. Waiting for the *gardien* by the road, by a pile of hot road stone, each time I visited Cap Blanc I had stared longingly across to Commarque, less, I am bound to say, for the cavern with engravings and carvings underneath the castle than for the castle itself, in which *La Belle* might well have met *La Bête* in Cocteau's film. Useless, though, to ask the *gardien* of Cap Blanc: he has no time, he has work to do, it is too far, he has no lamp to show you the cave under this habitation of *La Bête*. But go and explore, as I did at last. Go down past Cap Blanc, out of the wooded slope, over fields speckled in the sunshine with Carthusian pinks, across the little Beune by a prehistorical bridge of sagging, rotting logs, coming at last to a shadowy track below bushes, parallel with the further cliff, which goes direct and daringly into *La Bête*'s dominion. (Plate facing page 112.)

Brushing aside the branches across this lane I felt like the father, or like the horse, pushing through into enchantment in the first minutes of the film; and for the dubieties or terrors or panics of this castle I can promise no great palaeolithic reward, offering it chiefly for its own sake, as an interlude almost. Indeed, whipped by wet twigs and leaves (since a storm had been coming up while I examined the horses of Cap Blanc in their penthouse, and had now broken and extinguished the sun), I missed the palaeolithic cave at first, entering, in lieu, rather timidly into the rock stables of Commarque, at a point where the castle rested its tonnage of years and stone precisely overhead on the brow of the cliff. I found myself examining with a little trepidation (this was far from home, in any case) stalls hacked from limestone in which rather different horses fed from mangers of rock, tied up by their halters to holes carefully bored through the rock. Nothing palaeolithic in these stables. I climbed up under dripping trees to a vast dripping ruination, I crossed the moat by a rotten bridge, I felt myself the first hated Englishman here since the



English had prowled around and captured and plundered Commarque in the Hundred Years War. Vengeance might come at any moment. A notice said that Commarque was an historic monument, not to be defaced; but stone tumbles from stone, and nobody cares; and I experienced at last that tumbling emptiness, that eerie untidiness of neglect and decay and sparse vegetation proper to ruins, and now so rare upon English soil, where every ruin has to be officially tidied and busied and bullied into an historical specimen; and I understood now — how sharply — the melancholy of ruins rising out of the marches of uncertainty, the pleasurable shuddering dread of ruins, of the age of Walpole and Gray, which now appears to us to have been affected and insincere. A little below the castle, down slopes of wet earth, half way again to the track along the base of the cliff, ruins of the chapel stand open and empty — yet not quite empty, woodmen having nailed lengths of pole together and set them up as a cross, black against the niche light of a small east window, in front of an altar of logs and withies. Yellow fragments of vaulting sprawl by the legs of this improvised altar, and to one side of it a smashed stoup for holy water projects from the wall.

No one seems to live nearer than a hundred miles.

Odd that the cave, at last found, was comforting almost; was by comparison almost disinfected of this melancholy. In the end it had not been difficult to find or difficult to explore; and the approach to it was altogether weird.

The cliff leans over to the deserted lane. At one point rubbish and ruination from the castle have cascaded a long while ago over the edge into a hogback. The cliff cantilevers nearly to the top of this hogback, making and roofing a half-lit tunnel for nearly a hundred yards. The long ridge or mound of cascaded debris, forming the outer side of the tunnel, is grown with foetidly tall close trees, with sprawling nettles, with Greater Celandine (both plants of human association), and a few hart's-tongue ferns. Old grey logs, enormous ones, have been dragged into the tunnel beneath the rock and forgotten. Ropes of ivy hang from above, the light is green, and bats, even in early afternoon, fly in and out of a masonry doorway without a door, which is fitted into the rock. Here is the cave, the refuge after the horrors, the scale and the loneliness of the castle, the

damp slopes and dripping trees; and in the cave at least the sheer pathos and disturbance which still attach to an historic ruin, have been burnt away by the chilly fire of so much that is beyond history.

I reached the cave by balancing along the grey logs. Serried insects inside with spotted wings (and apparently no evil nature or intent) scarcely budged from the light of my carbide lamp. Bats went on flying, and I started to search for sculpture and engravings. Better to go into this little cave — into any cave where there will be no guide, no wiggling rod — with a list of every single item which may be discerned. Leftwards, in a sandy corridor, I should find nothing, according to my list. A second corridor would be as devoid of the arts, leaving a third one taller and wider, twisting twenty-six yards into blackness. In this last corridor with torch or carbide lamp you may manage to put revealing shadow into the engraver's line surrounding an ibex, a reindeer's head (rather good, and gentle) without horns, and a wild horse with a mane. And at the very end, in the last yard or so of the twenty-six yards, one of the ancient artists (the Abbé Breuil equates all the images on this cave, by the way, with the Magdalenians of Cap Blanc) has adapted the shape and furrows of the rock to a horse's head, large, about life-size, in a relief which is complete with muzzle and ears and protruberant eye. Wriggle around and start back, and you can hardly miss an engraved horse with long ears, and an ibex engraved on the horse (upside down), though in outline the horse seems more like a bull-terrier erecting a single ear or an ox flourishing a single horn. Then again your light shows the lines along the uneven rock of a horse in relief, a little crude, thirty-three inches long, hiding below those same serried speckled lazy insects which cover the wall like hat-veiling.

Another shrine, here under the castle, of the life of horses; but a dismal, dirty little shrine, by comparison with Cap Blanc; a reminder also that art of the Upper Palaeolithic is like art of the Later Steel Age: it varies as much between good and bad as Steel Age art, which from a long view would embrace a drawing by Picasso, a carving by Henry Moore, a plastic model in a shop window without clothes, a Virgin in pale pink and mauve plaster, a fashion-plate portrait by Annigoni, and a sex-scribble on the cave-walls of a public lavatory.



After this exercise in lonely subterranean recognition, after the castle, after the green light and the foetid trees, how much on that evening I liked re-emerging into the openness of the valley and staring across at the clean rock and woods of Cap Blanc and the only half-ruined Château of Laussel!

## VIII

### Calvin's Pulpit and Three Venuses

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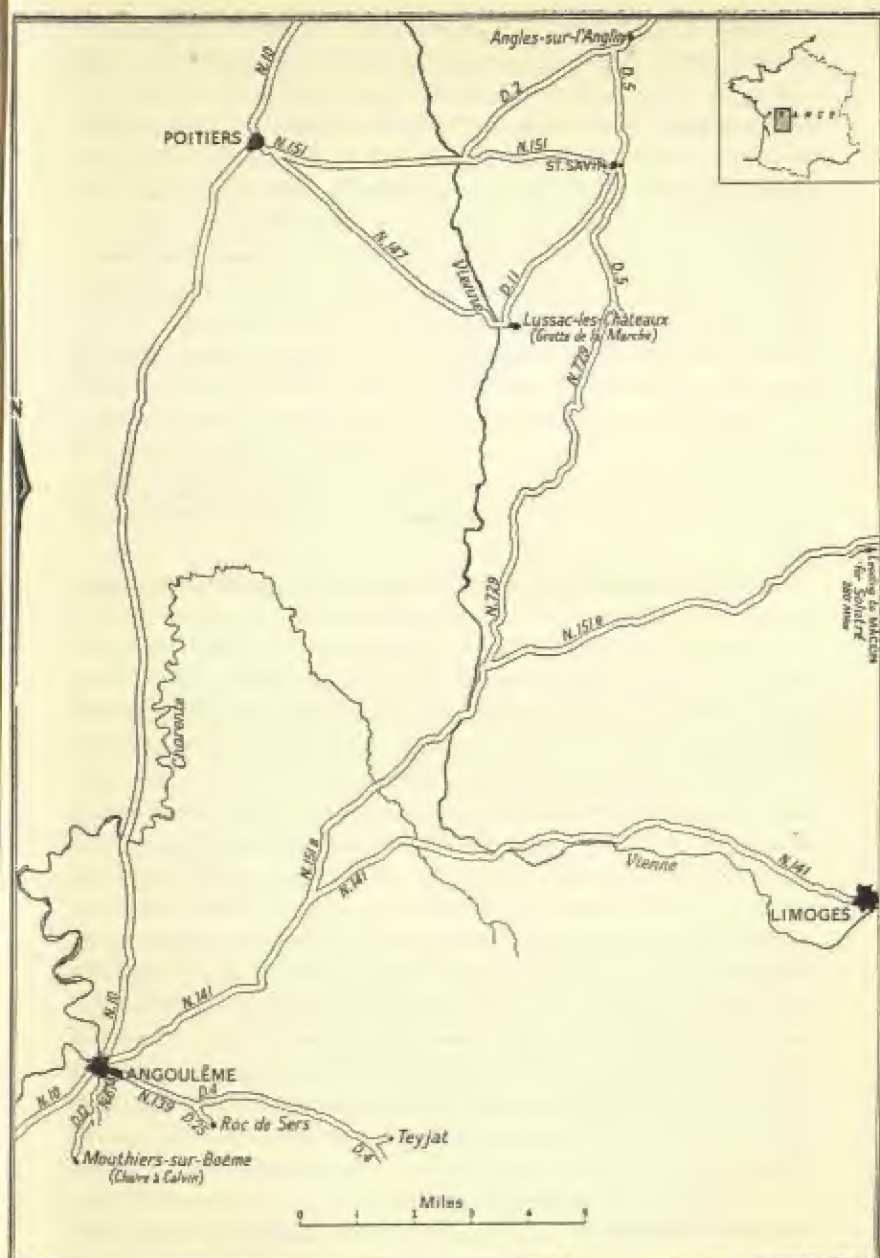
MORE SCULPTURE YET before going south. And rain once more, and water-conduits and piles of china-clay, buildings half of the eighteenth century, half modern, below a cliff, and a long thin red chimney on top of the cliff, as if this paper factory or paper mill made use of a cave (perhaps it does).

That was my prelude to the sculptures of La Chaire-à-Calvin — Calvin's Pulpit. For Cap Blanc in the last chapter — at any rate, for the cave and ruined castle of Commarque — an atmosphere of being a hundred miles away from anywhere and anyone; for La Chaire-à-Calvin, a sense and a scene of activity, and a village in which nobody seemed to know or care about sculptures. In this Mouthiers-sur-Boëme the wild horses and the paper factory or paper mill are very close neighbours; but the paper wins. For the horses, no *gardien*, no protection, no entrance fee, no pride, no profit, no concern.

It had been a long way from Cap Blanc. I had camped by a ford and a footbridge below a farm; and had woken to hear rain pattering through the reeling of doves; I had packed the tent in the rain, and had driven a slow, sticky drive to Mouthiers (which is in Charente), by way of Angoulême. Clouds were inkily and solidly interminable and were crossed by lightning, and thunder mumbled and cracked, and roads glistened, and rain bolted and pelted, and did so with an especial extra strength on to the limestone heath above Mouthiers.

Would these sculptures of the Chaire-à-Calvin — supposing I found them — be worth the journey, the petrol, the rain, the sense one carries about in such foreign circumstances of an enclosing anxiety and desolation? I had been in two minds about this further pursuit of ancient carvings. There would be none in the region of the Pyrenees, there would be none in Spain. Should I be content, for the time being, with Cap Blanc, and go south at once, on this year's cave exploration? Or should I first reckon with the Chaire-à-Calvin and the Roc de Sers, and the cliff carvings at Angles-sur-l'Anglin?





3. Caves near Poitiers and Angoulême

Angles was doubtful. I suspected (and was quite right) that its carvings would still be locked and barred; which might be the case, too, at the Roc de Sers and the Chaire-à-Calvin, for all that any guidebook had to say. Still, the carvings at the Roc and the Chaire were called 'Solutrean': they promised to be later and more accomplished than the rough Venuses of Laussel, earlier than the sullen magnificence of the mares and stallions of Cap Blanc, standing for a second intervening stage in the development of sculpture; and at least they could be combined in a single journey (perhaps with a look on the way at the Magdalenian engravings of Teyjat).

Angles-sur-l'Anglin, further north in Vienne, would have to wait. So — I had driven more than eighty miles in the steam, and I was here at Mouthiers at last; and at last in the very private-seeming yard of the paper mill, regarded curiously, on this wet afternoon, from each of the front doors of a row of workmen's houses, which were built along the cliff, backing on to it, in this new valley of the huge limestone areas of France.

The Abbé Breuil in his *Four Hundred Centuries of Cave Art* is very curt about the horses of La Chaire-à-Calvin, as though he had disliked the excavator and his methods, and as though his blessing, for once, had never been invoked upon the discovery. The horses deserve better. It was not difficult to locate them, after all, across the factory yard, past drying-wires, past hens draggled in the rain, between reeds and elders and elms, and along a wet path, to a broken gate. There they were, underneath a large overhang which creates almost a cave. There was this insulted string of animals, above what a medley of disorder and neglect! Above old trunks, old bottles, old bamboo baskets, and empty cigarette packets, above occupation layers half-excavated, above wooden boxes filled, some with bones, some with flints dug from the compacted layers by an archaeologist who seems never to have come back. It was like visiting some desert island and finding above the shore-line the handiwork and rubbish of an archaeological or a treasure-hunting expedition long ago abandoned and forgotten. All that was required under the dusty pellitory and maidenhair, among the tall blue bellflowers and the stiff deathly spires of toothwort, was the archaeologist's own skeleton. He should have lain there with flowers between his ribs, a few pieces of cloth still attached to them, and a flint spearhead firm in his naked bony brow, long a tenement for earwigs.



A smaller frieze, after Cap Blanc; smaller horses, and not so many of them. The cliff bulges forward, blackish or grey above the band of yellow rock uncovered by excavation. Two gravid mares stand head to head (or neck to head, since the head of the first one has vanished). Then a stallion with his one visible foreleg bent back and with his tail erect and arched, is leaping a mare orgasmically across the rock, his body in relief over the mare's body, her head down, her neck curved. As for the first two animals, their legs fade away as if they had never been carved in full (which is likely enough); but their tails, close to the body, are well-shaped and clear-cut; and both are livened by the concave and convex curves of their backs and their foal-tight bellies. The head of the second horse is deeply cut, and retains the sharpness of its carving and the velveteen tenderness in the shaping of its muzzle.

Only the placing of the stallion over the mare defeated the sculptor. At any rate he has made the stallion a little thin, skimpy, and unconvincing, almost the idea of an image having to serve for the image itself. These horses, too, were painted within a bounding line of black pigment, some of which you can still trace, in spite of the moss which grows now along their backs and their cruppers.

Not such vehicles of being, not so full as the horses of Cap Blanc? Perhaps so; but here at least the four horses of fertility can be examined, not only without tickets, without fuss or indifferent company, but without the interfering shadows of a penthouse.

In the scrambling return from Calvin's Pulpit and the stallion and his mares, the tall, thin, very red chimney of the paper mill, coming again into vision, appears like some parasitical orchid erecting and thrusting itself out of the grey cliff, above the workmen's houses and above a foam of elder blossom. Across the meadows of the Boème the parallel cliff, on the far side, humps a grey shoulder here and there through its muffling of trees, and Mouthiers itself (which is not the most welcoming village) owns also a few other carvings — lions on the façade of a Romanesque church which are hardly so leonine as these four fertility horses are equine; also a seated Adam and a seated Eve on either side of the west doorway, Eve with fig leaves, Adam, as they say, entire.

Looking at Adam, Eve, and the lions — approximations, all of them — you see again how the sculpture of ideas differs from the sculpture of a translated, or mediated, reality.

A sense of the palaeolithic flooded back outside the village, in a fast evening drive towards the hill town of Villebois-Lavalette, in sunshine again, which now levelled itself across rolling corn country specked with fruit trees or walnut trees. For once nothing could have been easier than creating anew in the mind an Old Stone Age landscape. Trees, hedges, crops, farms, glimpses now and then of the raised agger of a Roman road, could all be sponged off, and one could imagine here a grass-steppe on which the wild horses of La Chaire-à-Calvin grazed and galloped to the horizon, or stumbled as they felt the long, whippy, feathered javelins (remember the fat javelined horses of Lascaux) quivering with abominable pain in their belly or their rump. Cover this steppe with February snow and the illusion would be complete.

I was much, much less captured by Le Roc de Sers, in deep woods south-east of Angoulême and north of Villebois. Perhaps it was the effect of a dirty supper and a dirty room and a night expecting but not experiencing bugs in a town (Villebois) happily indifferent to tourists or travellers. Or perhaps my eyes were not out of register the next day, and these carvings in a small frieze — musk-ox, horses, bison, deer and man and an ox with a pig's head — were indeed, for all their Solutrean reputation, rather weak and dull. They are all cemented into position and protected with boards under an open shed of galvanized iron, these reliefs; and they are cut into a white, rather soft limestone. The valley in which they are found with some difficulty, in *le station préhistorique de Roc*, is peaceful enough and lonely, absorbing into itself and its damp leaves the galvanized shed and a grey hut which contains a guide in July and August and blessed emptiness at all other seasons of the year. A stream makes a noise, poplar leaves rustle, the notices are overgrown, the valley appears indifferent to the old evidences recovered and protected; indifferent also to more recent emotions which have set a tall statue of the Virgin in the opening of a grubby leaf-mouldy cavern near at hand.

Along the green valley below Le Roc trains used to run, and I had been instructed to find a little house at an old level-crossing and ask the way. A girl came to the door, a widow of a few weeks, pale, and pregnant as a Solutrean mare. To show the way to the sadness of Le Roc was a diversion in her own sadness; and back at the road again, nimble for all her pregnancy, she ran up to the house by the abandoned railway, ran back, and pushed through the car window



blossoms of Madonna Lily — which always smell, alas, of death and sadness. No, I required Teyjat that day to renew a trust in palaeolithic art; in place of indifferent carving I required a glimpse at any rate of the best of Magdalenian engravings, and in this second chapter on carvings I must be allowed the interval of a happiness I found sixteen or seventeen miles on through the forest. By the time I met on that afternoon M. Lagrange the blacksmith and made him stop work on a hay-cutter and light his carbide lamp and take me to what he called *l'Hôtel de Ville de Teyjat*, I had bathed in a stream and recovered, I had eaten well, under poplars (blessed be the poplars of France) by a mill below La Chapelle St Robert, I had listened again to orioles (and blessed the orioles of France), I had watched a grey wagtail walking over a bed of water crowfoot blossom in mid-current, had marked in the most engaging and relaxing idleness how the stones and ducklings snailing in the rapids were of the same colour, I had drunk half a bottle of wine, and had slept; and here was no sad valley, no young widowed pregnancy, no paper mill in the rain, but the happiest and most receptive of small villages. Here in Teyjat four roads met in an open space, by a church grey outside, inside white like icing-sugar, hollyhocks standing by the side door and a vine growing over the arch of the door, symbolically. Here were grey houses with pale blue sun-faded shutters. Here old ladies in black sat on chairs over white needlework, at their doorways, under vines and under crimson roses and purple roses (yes) which spread across the grey walls; and in one corner the *épicerie* was bowered by flowers planted in tubs and boxes and by — supreme flowers of happiness — white and pink oleanders.

*Remember Thebes:*

*The towers of Cadmus toppled, split asunder,*

*Crash! in the shadow of her oleanders*

*The pure and placid Dirce still flows by.*

A pure and placid stream flows across the open space of Teyjat.

It is a few yards only from M. Lagrange's smithy to an ivy-hung hole, to a door in limestone which the blacksmith now unlocked; and here in this peculiar cavern you encounter the engravings almost at once, almost immediately beyond the door, on a curve of flow-stone. Up and down and across this unexpected, shattered canvas or

panel the Abbé Breuil recognized forty-five animals. The best of them, some in place — original place — some on broken slabs, require no long gaze or tricky elucidation. They are as clear and clean as could be, seeming to be the work of a single draughtsman, at once sympathetic and strong in style. In the acrylene light the shadowed lines reveal straightaway an outlined stag, above a reindeer, a fawn, and a horse; they reveal a stag's head superimposed on a gravid horse; then a small horse isolated above a medley of bison, mares, reindeer. Then, firmest of all, giving of all these engraved drawings the most absolute sense of sympathy and second creation and truth, you observe Teyjat's brief procession of oxen; not the great coarse *Bos primigenius* of Lascaux, but the smaller *Bos longifrons*; not the picturesque angular tamed cattle in a landscape by Rubens or a landscape by James Ward, but three gravely and gracefully outlined wild animals, in the customary procession of bull and cow — or cows. First, in fact, a cow is followed by its bull, then another cow brings up the rear across the surface of stalagmite. Absolute purity of line on rock, which was also once clean and white, encloses and conveys muzzle and horn and limb, the animal character and the sex character, the slenderness and tenderness of the cows, the sullenness, heaviness, and masculinity of the bull, sniffing at the tail and the flank of the cow ahead of him.

Perhaps these are the most perfect of all known palaeolithic engravings, some, in brief, of the most perfect and most telling animal drawings which man has ever executed; and let me add they cannot be judged from photographs, or from copies. (Plate facing page 129.)

Teyjat is a horrible *cave*, all the same. The smooth, once clean flow of calcite at the entrance must have been an irresistible 'plate', since its walls are all of them rough and ragged and unsuitable for engraving or painting of any kind. Its floors also are wet and sticky with a quite invincible yellow clay. M. le Blacksmith pointed to soles and heels which this clay had pulled from the feet of visitors. A smaller cave opens at right angles to this most peculiar of print-rooms, giving access (if you care to foot the clay) to the little stream which emerges to flow coolly and cheerily and purely and placidly through the village, past the purple roses, vines, and oleanders.

Pleasant afterwards to sit by the stream, admire the village, remember the drawings (which belong to the time of the developed

*Opposite.* LEFT. Commarque, from above the cliff at Cap Blanc.  
RIGHT. The Célé, near Cabrerets.







ABOVE. One of the horses of Cap Blanc. BELOW. The frieze, Cap Blanc.



polychromes of Altamira or Font-de-Gaume) — and scrape your shoes and wash them off in the lucid water.

And after this interlude, Angles-sur-l'Anglin, away to the north, another, longer way up the Vienne and the Gartempe. Angles; and sculpture once again.

The village certainly does give you a good welcome, which I needed after a hundred and forty miles; and certainly has dramatic levels, ruins, rocks; and by its look it has known men for twenty thousand years and a great deal more; but the carvings (which this time are Magdalenian, though earlier than the engraved oxen of Teyjat) are still, alas, fenced off impenetrably in their shelter above the Anglin. Don't give in. Though in the village they reiterate that all is locked, hidden, invisible, *defendu*, under the cliff, don't give in; but climb down to the river, and climb up again through nettles, and push your nose hard to the wire, when early evening sun strikes along the river and the cliff; at least it will pick out for you most of the figures on the other side of the wire, which will be more consolation than coming merely to another Great Good Place, to another cliff, another slow stretch of water gently carrying its water-lilies, gently rippling around its trout and its black bass.

Though the discoveries here are not yet *aménagés* and opened and turned into a national monument, I shall include their story to show how multiple and interlocked the causes of a find may be. Years ago under this cliff above the Anglin an archaeologist dug for a little while and found oddments of a Magdalenian occupation. His chosen site was below a small overhang which was called, from its owner's name, the Cave à Louis Taillebourg — Louis Taillebourg's Cellar. With that his investigations ended — or dead-ended. But twenty-two miles away other investigators made other finds. Back along our trail towards Teyjat and the Roc de Sers and the Chaire-à-Calvin, beyond St Savin and its painted church of the eleventh century, down the valley of the Gartempe and over in the next limestone valley, which is threaded by the Vienne, you come to the town of Lussac-les-Châteaux. In the guidebooks Lussac finds a place for the riverside tomb of Sir John Chandos, Knight of the Garter, Edward III's Lieutenant in France, constable of Aquitaine, seneschal of Poitou (the old province of this neighbourhood), wounded to death here, on the bridge over the Vienne, on December 31, 1369.

But again, in Lussac, there are cliffs and caves — there are caves forming part of houses, caves for hens, caves for pigs, caves at the back of gardens, useful for tools and potatoes and endive, saving the cost of a garden-house. Archaeological books have made much of one of these caves, the Grotte de la Marche, giving it a celebrity which has not penetrated, understandably, Lussac-les-Chateaux itself. I asked a brisk old man for the Grotte de la Marche.

'Une grotte?' — very doubtfully, as if there were not *grottes* by the score. 'De la Marche? *de la Marche*? Une grotte . . .' he repeated; he looked at me, and saw I was English, all too evidently and aurally.

'Ah' — a wonderfully expressive illuminated *Ah!* — 'Ah, ce n'est pas le *tombeau de Chandos*?'

But then he looked at the carbide lamp I carried, and decided after all that a *grotte* must be a *grotte*, that a tomb was a tomb, and I should require no carbide lamp for Sir John who had graced Lussac with his death and burial. He passed me like the can to a second, brisker Frenchman, under the horse-chestnut trees, who knew; and in a few minutes, past a few streets in which hens laid and pigs grunted in holes in the rock, across a little chattering tributary of the Vienne by a stone footbridge like a clapper-bridge imported to France from Dartmoor, past women beating and slapping clothes and clouting the water with blue suds, up a path, and over a bedstead, and through a garden of orange soil and past beans and lettuces and parsley, we came to the mouth of this book-celebrated Grotte de la Marche, excavated with very surprising results in 1937. The Frenchman pulled away an old door laid sideways on the ground, and the portion of an iron bedstead, and an eye — an EYE, large and buttony and bloody, greeted the two of us in immediate mid-darkness; belonging to an ox's head suspended here to be in the cool. Not inappropriate, this skinned head, this bloody eye, to a cave which the hunters of *Bos longifrons* had known and frequented once upon a time.

In the floor of La Marche, a low irregular little maisonette with knobbly walls altogether as wrong for drawing or painting as the walls of the cave at Teyjat, the two excavators had surprisingly found a great number of limestone slabs scratched with the likenesses of men and women, and beasts of the chase. Old men and young men, bearded men and smooth men, men exceedingly mas-



culine, women exceedingly pregnant, slim women, men dancing, portrait-heads in profile, drawings which show details of clothing, bangles, necklaces, head-dresses and hair style — all were found in the dry floor-filling of this cave; drawings less rough, less approxi-



*Dancer and Musician, from Grotte de la Marche*

mate, and more revealing and more personal than most representations of mankind in the Old Stone Age. The deposits — the artifacts of the cave, including these drawings or scratchings — were Early Magdalenian.

After La Marche was made known, Mlle Suzanne de St-Mathurin recognized a similarity between the artifacts of La Marche and the artifacts which had been excavated before the Second World War at Angles, in the Anglin gorge, in the Cave Louis Taillebourg. The interlocking of causes is nearly complete. In 1947 Mlle de St-Mathurin and her English friend Dorothy Garrod pushed through the brambles and nettles above the river, and examined the debris of the old excavations and picked up a stone engraved like one of the plaques out of the Grotte de la Marche. They worked hard under the

cliff in 1948, they dug back the earth and stones from what they now saw to be not just Louis Taillebourg's Cellar, but a long rock-shelter. They found tools enough to date the deposits along the shelter to the same Early Magdalenian of La Marche; they uncovered slabs scratched with drawings; stones, too, which were carved and painted, one of them a horse's head.

The next season's delving repaid them better still. First of all, as they removed it, they examined with great care, stone by stone, a dump left behind by the excavator of 1934. Almost at once, they recognized a young ibex carved in relief, head and shoulders; and next their workman cried out that he had found a stone on which there seemed to be colour. They took it to the river's edge, they cleaned it off; and there, carved, engraved, painted, all in one, were a man's head and shoulders in relief; his profile relating him to some of the scratched portraits of La Marche — for example by an identical shallow concavity of nose, giving a bowl-shaped face which I have often noticed myself on living people in the cafés and markets of the Dordogne, even more in the Petites Pyrénées.

Better was to come. Along the rock-shelter, along this Roc aux Sorciers, there must have been a frieze of animals. A bison was still in place in the Cave Taillebourg, but frost and thaw, before the end of the Ice Age and the return of the forests, had brought down sections of roof and wall and fragments of carving — of chamois and bison and ibex and horse. The bearded man in profile, with his tumbling hair, his indications of a fur jacket, his purplish and black colours which had been preserved by the way he was buried face down, had himself been part of the ancient frieze along the shelter. Would this frieze continue still in place, still undamaged, or not badly damaged, below the deposits?

Mlle de St-Mathurin and Miss Garrod dug, and there it was again.

Trenching inwards to the rock forty yards on from the bison, they came upon a second bison. Then trenching back along the surface towards bison No. 1, they uncovered with amazement and delight two more bison, then a mare, then another bison, then horses and five ibex, one of them a kid followed by its mother. And between ibex and horses the earth came away to introduce to our world, to our eyes, the Three Venuses of Angles-sur-l'Anglin.

Again, sculptor's tools lay under the cliff — large flints, large picks, and burins. And Professor Garrod and Mlle de St-Mathurin,



business-like in their trousers and berets, also recognized crude pestles, and crude mullers impregnated with the ochre and the manganese which had been ground in them long ago. Bones of horse, reindeer, bear, mammoth, and saiga antelope were identified as well.

Here, then, in my pilgrimage, after Cap Blanc, Commarque, Laussel, the Chaire-à-Calvin, the Roc de Sers, and after the Musée de l'Homme above the Seine in Paris, outside of which a bronze bison rubs like a cat against the bronze flank of a large early *Homo sapiens* averting his eyes from the Eiffel Tower across the river, and inside of which can be seen not only the Venus of Laussel but the coloured human and the young ibex and the horse's head from this cliff — here, at last, I had come to Angles-sur-l'Anglin; here was the castle, here was the great mill-wheel which turns slowly in the sun, here were the women outside the castle who make lace in the sun, here was the gorge in the sun and in the shadow; here, too, was the inn, the Lion-d'Or, around a courtyard in which the tables are set with check tablecloths and in which pink and white hollyhocks grow up out of shadow into sun against grey walls, as if they had an entirely unsentimental, unEnglish right to existence and to gigantic growth. Yet — exactly where, in this perfect village and Great Good Place (France has plenty of perfect villages) was I going to find the Three Venuses, the Three Primitive Graces of Angles-sur-l'Anglin, which I had come such a long way to see, *aménagées* or no?

At Lussac-les-Châteaux heads had been shaken with doubt. At Angles-sur-l'Anglin heads were shaken with certainty. They were locked up, these ladies and their neighbouring beasts; and could *not* be inspected. I repeat, persistence was required; and not giving in brought me down a lane, and past a ford which is still crossed by yoked oxen pulling hay or corn or wood, and past a ruined mill, to the poplars and the black river and the water-lilies, past a boat tied to the stump of an alder tree, past — but no, up to — an odd concrete table and concrete platform on the very edge of the river. Victims, you might say, were evidently sacrificed upon this table to a river god, upon an altar suitable to such a curiously named Roc aux Sorciers; blood, you might say, was clearly intended to drain by the channels ornamentally gouged in the concrete, clearly meant to vanish down a plug-hole and join the water-lilies in the river, under the trees. But in fact this blend of altar and sink was used to wash each new fragment of rocky art which the two

archaeologists recovered from the cliff, twenty feet higher up, behind the brambles.

And behind the brambles, how brusque a notice now greeted me from the impenetrable wire!

I am forbidden — the verb is perhaps nicely chosen — to penetrate.

I am ordered to take no photographs.

I am ordered almost to attend to my own business and disappear or disintegrate.

Never mind. Much is unveiled; and from the great amount of fallen limestone which lies about, the story of this portion of the shelter — by Louis Taillebourg's Cellar — is, plain as can be, a story of frost, fall, and burial.

The impenetrable wire continues to the left, though it is easier to drop again to the river, push a little further by the path, and re-ascend by a slope of nettles and of debris thrown off from the remarkable frieze which is now visible, after all the head-shakings in the village — so long as you insert your nose at one point or another and gaze and gaze and avoid leaving your eyeballs behind you transfixed on the barbs of the barbed wire.

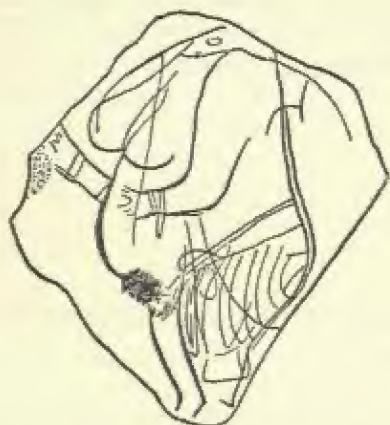
Here are the Venuses, life-size, woman-size; no arms, no heads, no breasts; no feet, no knees, only bellies, thighs, and centre. Here are the three vulvas, the three slit triangles, the bellies and the upper legs, carved with no inconsiderable grace — svelte figures on the rock, enlargements quite simply, the Abbé Breuil has pointed out, of that tiny Magdalenian *Venus impudica*, or shameless Venus, without head, arms, or feet, which the Marquis de Vibraye discovered so many years ago at Laugerie Basse, on the Vézère.

'The emphasis', said the first report, 'is on the genital parts; on the second Venus the vent is very much accentuated; the pubic triangle is strongly marked in all three and the inguinal folds are indicated by a deep groove.' The Venus in the middle, the two excavators thought, may have represented a young woman at the beginning of pregnancy. Her belly swells more fruitfully from the cliff than the others.

Here they are, then, these Venuses, rising close under the projecting roof, central in this unfallen part of the frieze, upon stone which is fresh and yellow and unweathered in contrast to the cliff overhead. Here you see, also (if you scramble down to the rock-



shelter, as I advise, when an evening sun directs its rays *across* the carvings), the outline of bison, of horse, and ibex, including one bull bison with raised tail immediately below the Three Venuses. Here you can enjoy, even at a distance, this startling exhibition of fertility; always feeling, though, that if you stick your nose too far through the wire a lady archaeologist will spring from behind the



*Grotte de la Marche, female figure*

weeds inside and bash it with the flat of a trowel, or slit it with the edge.

Consider the scale, the length of this frieze, extending, as it did in Magdalenian days for more than forty yards along the rock. The animals that remain are not so big as the horses of Cap Blanc; the relief is not so high; and the Venuses, for all their grace, appear as if they had been reduced (not surprisingly) more towards symbol, as if they were rather of less concern to the sculptor or sculptors than the bison, the horses, the ibex. Yet again how well defined, how bold a frieze this must have been, from bison along to bison, how opulent when it was new and coloured, how important and how worshipful! And does the name Roc aux Sorciers — Wizards' Rock — imply some tradition of odd doings here, or some evidences of such doings now lost and forgotten?

My researches against the wire, I should say, were helped by a leggy, amiable, talkative, innocent, elderly man, who admires and

wonders over the carvings, and delights in the ruined mill by which he lives, a few hundred yards from this Roc aux Sorciers, enjoying the ford, and the fishing, and the spring which hubble-bubbles out of his meadow cold and cress-encircled.

He has retired here from a successful businessman's life in Milwaukee and in Chicago. In later excavations at Cap Blanc, in 1914, they exhumed a Magdalenian, who lay there after a successful huntsman's life in palaeolithic France. They shipped this retired huntsman out to Chicago, to the vast Field Museum of Natural History on the shores of the lake. *Quid pro quo.*



## IX

### Below the Pyrenees

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HOW ACTUALLY WERE caves formed in limestone? And when? As for date, long before the era of *Homo sapiens* in Europe. As for how (a problem very much in dispute), enough to say they were made by the flow of water along joints and bedding-planes in the great deposits of limestone. The water was acid. By means of the carbon dioxide it had picked up from the air which is trapped in soil, it dissolved the calcium carbonate, which limestones are made of; and then, after the first tunnels had been eaten through the rock, torrential waters came, and stones and gravel were tumbled along, and rubbed away at these tunnels of solution, and enlarged them still further.

New caves formed under old ones; and the old ones were left high and dry, more or less, for beasts, for man — and painting.

When the white glaciers came, caverns were often sealed or blocked, the flow of water diminished or discontinued. When the white glaciers melted, the melt-waters might sweep and roar and gurggle through a cave, leaving behind them, as they died away, sand, gravel and boulders.

That happened in the vast antrum of Niaux, in the limestone edge of the Pyrenees. A little old guide waddled ahead, his carbide flame illuminating only a vague travelling dome inside enormities of darkness; his feet and mine padded softly and without noise on a sandhill deposited so far inside the mountain after the melting and the shrinking of the Pyrenean glaciers. I think I am right in saying that the ice of the last glaciation would have filled this blue Pyrenean valley outside, which runs up from Tarascon past the cave and the village of Niaux and goes on to Vicdessos, from which higher roadless valleys and roadless passes over the harder, loftier, older rocks, climb into the territories of Andorra and Spain. Left and right of Niaux, left and right of the valley, the lower mountains rise to four thousand five hundred feet and six thousand feet. Ahead, as you clamber over loose stones to the little entrance of the big cave, you look up the cleft towards Spain, and catch sight, overtopping everything in the

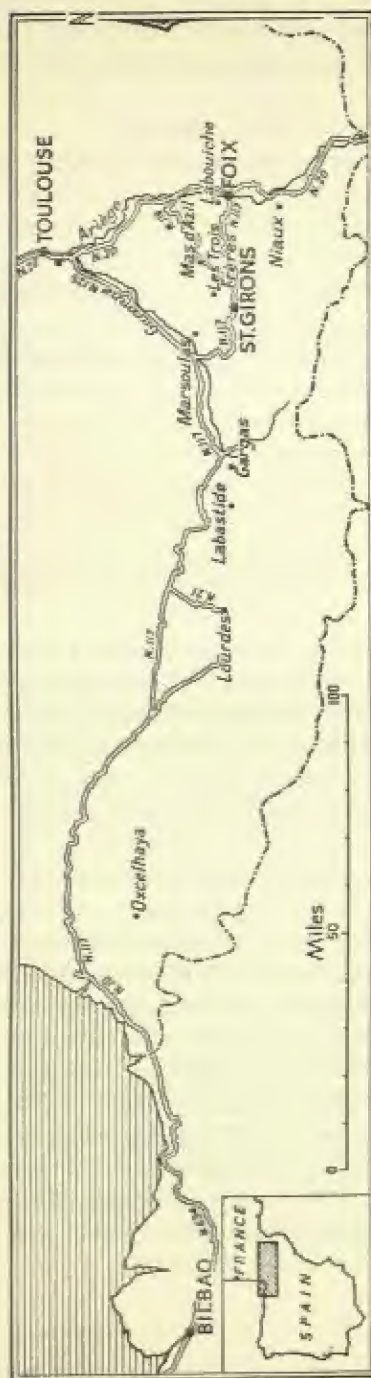
distance, of peaks as high as ten thousand feet; which will still be covered, as likely as not, with snow. A glacier in its heyday would have wound down from the direction of those peaks, covering the entrance to Niaux. Eventually the melt-waters would have rushed through its galleries and rushed out through a larger entrance or exit, which was blocked afterwards by falls, leaving no more than today's cupboard door into the great interior. The cave dried, more or less, and was used.

The painters crept into Niaux, fixed up their lamps, and drew, in silence, half a mile underground.

Down here, in Ariège and to the west in the part of Haute-Garonne which reaches the mountains, and in the Hautes-Pyrénées, the caves tend to be enormous, gaunt, and bare; not only Niaux, but Bédheillac (in which aeroplanes were built during the war), and Mas-d'Azil, and Labastide; and the art inside them tends also to be late, and to seem a little more impressive than it really is, owing to the black hollow enormity of the circumstances.

On the long way down here from the Dordogne and the Lot, from Lascaux, Cougnac, and Pech-Merle, from limestone to limestone, from the grey uplands across flats drained by the Garonne to the blue chasms by which the Pyrenees are approached and penetrated, several places — Moissac, Montauban, Toulouse — had offered their comments on the quest; relieving, too, a drive which was hot and tiresome. Moissac in Tarn-et-Garonne raised the spirits, just as by Montauban in the same department, twenty miles away, the spirits were instructively dampened and blanketed and lowered; after which came Toulouse — another thirty-two miles — to add a little dusty academic instruction in the Upper Palaeolithic. In Moissac up goes the spiritual temper when from blinding light one stares at the black, stony figures, standing, stretching, elongating, curving around the portal of the church of St Pierre; at black elongated angels; at the Three Kings, the Ox, the Ass, Mother and Child; at Dives and Lazarus; at Lust whose breasts are sucked by snakes, and whose vulva is sucked by a creature standing upon the backs of the snakes. Stare at this purposive complexity of eight hundred years ago, at the sinuous calm movement of long figures capped, some of them, so unexpectedly (if you are English, and used to the unexpressive Byzantinesque figures in the portal of Malmesbury Abbey) by faces already calm and human, already moved and





4. Caves along the Pyrenees

moving in return; and see above them all a severe Christ in complicated glory. Here is art which has climbed back from symbol to participation.

And if this art climbs further, and too far?

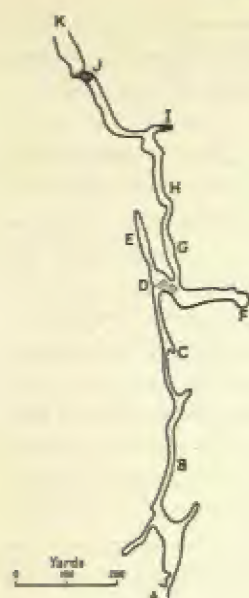
At Montauban, where you cross the Tarn, a notice says MUSÉE INGRES. From ground to ceiling, in a tall house above the river you may examine the coldest drawings — and paintings, too — of a grim conceit, and you may learn the answer. You may examine the work of a cold, correct, refined, castrated, and conceited master, or monster, who appears to have loved nothing and to have known nothing in the sense in which the greatest of the prehistoric draughtsmen loved the animals they drew, and possessed them — or rather shared with them an existence. At Montauban, drawing in the ultimate service of drawing and *la gloire*. Cast an eye over cold curves depicted by this pride of French museum officials (but not of French artists) in studies for the *Bain Turc*, look hard and long at the *Dream of Ossian* by this victim of *la gloire* (Ossian over his harp, contemplated by one of Walt Disney's bloodhounds); and cross the bridge.

Toulouse, after thirty-two miles; and at Toulouse, in the streets, nothing of Ingres, no obsession for the falsely perfect, only trams and noise and sweat and pullulation and berets tight above dark chins which need a great deal of shaving, on brief, plump bodies.

At Toulouse, bookshops sell guides to some of the chief palaeolithic caverns of the neighbourhood of the Pyrenees, Niaux and Mas-d'Azil included.

At Toulouse, a museum, between the Grand Rond and the river (the Garonne), contains a long prehistoric gallery, ill-arranged in the special, shabby, dusty, brown-varnished or bug-coloured, muddled, half-labelled manner of French museums, which just fails to hide its bones and pieces, its tools, its Magdalenian harpoons, Solutrean laurel-leaves, pebble mortars, in which colours were ground, and actual colours and ochre crayons out of Altamira, and painted pebbles from Mas-d'Azil, all so dryly distant from the caves, the life of the caves, and the preserved emotion in the caves. How many French museums — and galleries, too, divided from the light by their window curtains — are as depressing, as pedantic, and as dim! How encouraging that they should be so in a country where from the cave to the porch of Moissac, from the windows of





- A. Entrance
- B. Narrow passage
- C. First painted signs
- D. Accumulations of sand
- E. Figures drawn in the mud
- F. 'Salon Noir', with paintings,  
844 yards from entrance
- G. Principal gallery
- H. Human footprints
- I. Lake
- J. Lake blocking the cave, 1,218  
yards from entrance
- K. Continuation of cave for 328  
yards

### 5. *Plan of Niaux*

Chartres or the Sainte-Chapelle to the studio, emotions have been so freshly and constantly renewed, and techniques so energetic! In all countries isn't there, if we tell the truth, an inverse relationship between the energy of museums and the energies of art? Clear-lighted, white-painted museums; dull art, dead art, no art. Dull museums, drab museums: energetic art, energetic creativities.

From the bug-coloured fascination of these cases in the museum at Toulouse, from the dust dropped by the exhibits, from the locked cabinets and blank drawers and cupboards and creaking floorboards and the stench of antiquarian pedantry, it is another sixty-three and three-quarter miles to the real thing, to the roadside below the Pyrenees, the pull-in below the entrance into the cavern of Niaux, and the wild lavender and wild orchids and the smell of box alongside the steep path (to give a few more figures, you will have come, by the time you reach Niaux, a hundred and ninety miles from Lascaux direct, and seven hundred and fifty-two miles or thereabouts from London, by way of Lascaux).

To Niaux you transport your guide, you acquire him in the little mountain resort of Tarascon, and take him with you, and climb three hundred feet with him to the cave and sit comfortably against the hot limestone and recover your breath while he prepares his carbide lamps as solemnly as a priest preparing a thurible. The flame hisses, the chains jingle, and you disappear from daylight for an hour or two.

The sandhill I have mentioned comes after a silent subterranean walk of the best part of half a mile, a progression, it seems, into the heart of nothingness. If Pech-Merle suggests Ely or some other Gothic cathedral, if Cougnac is like some delicate lady chapel or chapter house of the midmost Middle Ages, if very fluted, vaulted, decorated ornamental caves full of sugar icing suggest, shall I say, baroque churches in Salzburg or some such extraordinary out-squirring and wriggling and coloration of the baroque fancy as the Kirche der Gebr. Asam which survives in a bomb-flattened Munich, or still more exactly some perspective fantasy of baroque buildings, which the painter Desiderio has surrounded with the murkiness of his mind and in which decay is now rampant, arches, columns, ghostly statues having fallen to the ground, then, by contrast, Niaux is the most plain, most grim, Romanesque. It is a cathedral never completed by its builders, so big, so lofty that if it contains colour, all traces of it are lost in silent altitudes too remote for the rays of a carbide lamp.

The cave is sometimes wide as a road, sometimes narrow as a snicket. Sometimes the floor is smooth, sometimes rough with young or broken stalagmites; sometimes sticky, sometimes interrupted with blocks of fallen limestone or with glacial boulders anciently and torrentially swept into the cave. Sometimes it is wet, sometimes dry; and a few blind alleys lead off on either side.

After five hundred yards, or a little more, red blobs along the rock in a fairly narrow sector of the cave give promise of the drawings somewhere ahead. You turn, you pad up the slope of glacial sand, studded since its deposition with bosses of stalagmite like the breasts of buried statues; and then, half a mile underground or undermountain, you are in the Salon Noir, a small round high-ceilinged chamber which concludes a short gallery.

Here are the black beasts of Niaux.

Here are bison, horses, ibex, and a red deer — a mountain and foothill and woodland assemblage painted around the gallery in



black. A late assemblage, as I have remarked. (Plate facing page 145.)

When you climb from the road up to Niaux, the guide points across the valley to the black double entrance of another cave almost exactly opposite. This is the Grotte de la Vache, in the mouth of which excavators have found relics of very late Magdalenians who lived by the horse and the bison; as they declare, Niaux — this Salon Noir with the black beasts — was no doubt the sanctuary of these men towards the very end of the Upper Palaeolithic.

The Salon Noir is marvellously removed, and still, and strange. Hold up a lamp, look at one of the bison, one of the horses, at the stag, large and distinct, more than three feet long: whatever *happened* here in front of these animals, for whatever reason they were painted, at least we know that the painters stood here, and worked; that the painters had to thread their way into this heart of darkness and nothingness and the half-known. Their original entrance was not the hole above the road by which we enter. It was probably a smaller cave, lower down and nearer the village of Niaux and now blocked by a fallen roof. So their original journey from a cold daylight into the Salon Noir would have been still longer than our own.

We have weakened the power and the effect of darkness. Supposing in the eighteenth century — so recently — you forgot on a November afternoon to light your lamp or your candles or your fire until after sunset, or suppose your light blew out: in that event you had to grope round the room, round the next room as well or three or four rooms, searching for the tinderbox. You had no matches, no lighter, no other source of light; and having found the mislaid tinderbox, you had to contrive to get the tinder ignited in the dark. If that could be tiresome and difficult, think of the Magdalenian artist deep in this cave, more than half a mile from the day. Difficult enough to give himself sufficient light by pine twigs or pine slivers or slab-lamps of stone, such as the one recovered in La Mouthe, with animal grease and dried moss for a wick. More difficult, and fearsome, if his light failed, in here.

Still, deep inside Niaux, archaeological romance ought not to blinker one's clear-sightedness. These are, most of them, rather decadent, rather second-rate drawings. Left and right there is simply a dull naturalism of bisons and ibex, as in a folio of animals drawn for children by some publisher's hack of the eighteen-fifties — or

nineteen-fifties. Figures are not so *felt* on to the rock; transferred to it, as they seem, from a stereo in the artist's mind. Figures are not so alive on the rock, bison are awkward, lumpy, unfilled with the energy of bison. There are exceptions: the red deer, for example, and a few of the horses. The stag, a little coarse beside the engraved stag in one of the galleries of Lascaux or beside some of the deer painted in Spanish caves, is memorable among all the images of cave art I have seen. I remember how this drawing sweeps its black line deliciously and convincingly from the curve of the antlers down the sinuosities of the back and over the full tenderness of the rump and round the softness, yet drum-tightness of the belly. On the same area of rock, as if drawn by the same hand, there are two notable horses, one of them only head and neck, and mane, the other head and neck and mane and forelegs; their frizziness, their volume, their horse character, their sullenness, the softness of their muzzles, are all proclaimed upon the rock. (Plate facing page 144.)

On the wall opposite, I remember also a little drawing of an ibex, stumbling, a spear in its back, two more spears low in its neck, an image which spoke with all the axiomatic truth of good drawing, unlike the great lumps of bison which surround it.

Of course, it is true that palaeolithic artists, broadly speaking, were able to picture with the most confidence and the most aesthetic affection, and so with the most durable effect, animals only of a few kinds, species of deer and species of horse especially, and the *Bos longifrons*. If you allow that these artists were capable of an aesthetic affection, in all their concern for creativity and plenty and subsistence, then they were likely to extend it most of all to animals of the most gratifying proportions. Bison, which so much abound in the caves, are of ungratifying, unpleasurable lineaments and proportions; they are, *per se*, unwieldy, awkward monsters to encompass with a line; and most bison paintings or drawings here and elsewhere (I would scarcely except the ones at Altamira) appear to me unsatisfying and aesthetically unconvincing and unattractive. The Mammoth and the Woolly Rhinoceros must, both of them, as well, have appeared a trifle ridiculous and grotesque. So they generally appear in the caves. The ibex, intent, alert, nervous, with swept-back horns, the bear, the lion — these can be presented with a gusto now and again; but it seems as though bison and mammoth were drawn, were painted, rather from necessity than from that joy in form





Entrance to Les Trois Frères.



Teyjat: Cow engraved on stalagmite (detail).



and line felt by the more powerful Aurignacian, Gravettian, and Magdalenian artists, no less, I am sure, than it was felt by a Pisanello.

And think your way down the history of the arts, and see if these early preferences I ascribe to the cave artists are not confirmed century after century, culture after culture. They liked to depict, they depicted most tellingly, the animals that after their day recur through art. We have added man to our preferences, and woman especially, and dog and cat and tiger, but we still delight in deer and horse; and even domesticated cattle have had their picturesque devotees. Whereas elephants tend to be drawn as strange newcomers (by Dürer, for example), as comics for the nursery, as Babar the Elephant, tenderness to deer has continued, and has been due, I suppose, to an ambivalence — to pleasure in their form and to gratification in hunting deer and eating them. And so with the horse. If the hunters of Lascaux and Pech-Merle, La Chaire-à-Calvin and Cap Blanc, the Grotte de la Vache and Niaux chased and ate the wild horse, there as well began a kinship of like ambivalence. France reminds us of it more inclusively than England. The horse has been tamed, the horse still carries king or queen, president or dictator (if he knows how to ride), the horse has been carved and painted through the ages. In China the horse has been a symbol of heaven, as the bull has been symbol of earth. And in France he appears in the caves, in wildness, at the start of his tale vis-à-vis man; and in every French town near the caves the sign of the horse's head still juts above the butcher's doorway.

The guide kneels and shows two trout fingered long ago in glacial clay; he shows the palaeolithic footprints of boys or adolescents in clay. He starts off to complete a trek to the farthest point of Niaux, where the cave ends in a small lake; he exhibits a few more images, signs, markings; by the lake he raises the lamp to two javelins side by side — or could they be plants? — set in reverse, feathered or leaved at the opposite ends; he talks of the cave as though it was his, and as though its secrets were as clear (to him) as the cold water in the final lake, and as if the archaeologists who have so wisely placed their fences and chains in front of the figured animals and who exaggerate the merit of these figures in their books, were no more than the most distant and most abstract of abstractions.

So much by itself, flaunting itself not at all to the exterior world, fitted with nothing except a few chains and a locked gate to keep off the profane, it is the merit of this enormous cavern of Niaux to remove the visitor out of time and out of archaeological text and footnote.

The cave near Bédheilac, four miles out of Tarascon, I have never seen, and I know nothing at first hand of its faded bisons, its drawings on clay, its one large coloured horse eight feet long, all of the same late provincial art as the beasts of the Salon Noir; I had other caves in mind, as thunder rumbled and grumbled below the Pyrenees. Thirty miles or so to the north-west over a ridgy interval of hills and woods and bad roads and small mountains below the big mountains, I should first reach Mas-d'Azil, then be within distance of Les Trois Frères, Tuc d'Audobert, Marsoulas, Montespan, Gargas, and Labastide.

Aiming first for Mas-d'Azil which would supplement the lessons of the decadence of Niaux, I went down the valley of the Ariège to Foix (which is the capital of the department), from Foix to St Jean-de-Verges, down the familiar N.20; and then left, up a long valley between woods, full of light and calmness. This road passes a little tantalizingly under and alongside the limestone ridge of the Montagnes de Plantaurel below another cave of some importance, for paintings, engravings, and a little red-ochred man, dancing, pleased with himself and displaying a projection of stalagmite for his member. Further away from the mountains and the glaciers, the art in this cave of Le Portel goes back from Magdalenian figures of bison to Gravettian and Aurignacian horses.

It will be locked, I thought. These horses, these bison, and the red man will be inaccessible; but then Les Trois Frères would be locked and private, and so would its neighbouring Tuc d'Audobert ending in clay modellings of bison on the floor; and Les Trois Frères I was determined to see, I was determined to eye its sorcerer or guardian spirit (who appears in every book on cave art) face to face.

Portel I might as well try; and it was not more than a mile or so out of the valley and up the ridge to the Pas du Portel, which crosses these mountains-in-miniature — up, indeed, to the hamlet or farm of Le Portel, after which the cave is named. Should I find the



cave near the farm? Easily, said a man working in a field by the road, easily. It was right alongside.

So near; and it might, it might after all, be open, or the key might be held by the farmer; and there was the farm: there, behind its fine cherry trees, now fruiting only for the birds, because the farm was deserted, roofless, brambled, crumbling, as if it had already been abandoned fifty or a hundred years.

And no sign of a cave. I knew it faced the valley, on the north-eastern slope of the ridge, yet, in full search, two of us nosed in circles, explored the thickets, and scratched ourselves and tore ourselves, thinking that perhaps a deserted farm meant a neglected, overgrown, hidden — but open — entrance to its *grotte*. In the end I returned to ask further advice from the same peasant under the ridge, and was humbled — bringing him back up the lonely mountain — when he took a track straight from the ruins to a small rectangular opening under a rock arch and a few hazel bushes. So close and so obvious — yet not obvious at all.

'He keeps it locked,' said this peasant, who had never thought to say that the farm was abandoned (it had been burned down by a platoon of Germans after a member of the *maquis* had been found there visiting his wife); and down below he pointed into the valley and across to the owner's manor-house on the far side. 'And he is away.'

I would look. I stumbled down a stony incline of a tunnel and gazed and glared through a subterrene gate of iron bars sturdy enough to withstand centuries of rust and the profane, and as locked as locked could be. Checkmate. The little man continued his dance inside; and Le Portel I am mentioning only as an example of the pains and the vanity of searching out a cave without knowing who owns it and with neither a large-scale map nor the most exact, most finicking directions. Black cherries, warm, glittering and sweet, staining the tongue and the lips, were the consolation prize, or the booby prize, at Le Portel.

On either side of this hard jagged ridge of Plantaurel a road pushes and bumps and rattles up another ten miles to Le Mas d'Azil, a large village or small town noisily drained by the Arize, which twists down from the high forests of another large and much loftier massif. The great cavern is up the road, up the river — indeed over both the road and the river. And it is this cave which brings us away

from Magdalenian art and Magdalenian huntsmen, this Mas d'Azil — the House of Azil — and that smooth adjective *Azilian* which introduce between them a next stage in the development of man, when the animals of the Old Stone Age had vanished, when tundra and taiga had given way to forest, and western Europe of a Middle Stone Age relaxed in warmth and rain. (Frontispiece.)

Damn braces, bless relaxes, said William Blake, and blessed with geniality, man in western Europe now abandoned the old heroism of his life and of his art. But I shall keep the revelations of Le Mas for a final chapter, adding only in the meantime that I found the town below the cave, for all its cracking, bolting, hailing, bouncing sub-Pyrenean thunderstorms, a good base for this art and these caverns. Also at Le Mas d'Azil prehistory's evidences extend from the caves to grey chamber-tombs or dolmens of the New Stone Age perched in loneliness above the blue air of the valleys.

Massat, where Édouard Lartet found his engraving of the head of a cave bear in September, 1860, when palaeolithic man was scarcely known and palaeolithic art was unknown to the world, is twenty miles to the south, as the crow flies, across the Massif de l'Arize.



## X

### Enigma With Horns

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LE PORTEL I KNEW I could miss. Les Trois Frères, the Cave of the Three Brothers, a dozen miles or so further west from Le Mas d'Azil, was altogether too momentous, and I had determined, as I say, not to miss it, though it might be less a matter of painting, or of the finest engraving, than of answers to the art's why and wherefore.

This time I had not missed it, thanks to Louis Bégouën, youngest of the three brothers. 'All modern comforts in France,' said Louis Bégouën, and he now poured warm water out of the carbide lamps over my hands, which were brown with the cave mud and with rust from the ladders out of the cave.

A year before I had not been so lucky. I had given no warning, I had come from Le Mas to Montesquieu-Avantès among its low zig-zagging hills, found the church emerging from a tangle of weeds and crosses, the *mairie* beneath huge plane trees, the hens scratching, and the unsurfaced road — a scrap of Roman road — diving down to the château of the old Comte de Bégouën; and he was in bed, this cave patriarch of the Pyrenees, ninety years old and more, Egyptian-hawk-faced, white-bearded, thin-wristed, courteously remarking that he himself could not conduct me into Les Trois Frères or into Tuc d'Audoubert, and that his son Louis, who could and would at some other time, was, alas, in Toulouse for a week. Pigeons flew past his window and hay-makers were busy on his fields outside; and disconsolately I had gone back and down the lane to the cave, and wondered if ever I should see all that lay concealed under this other long ridge which showed its rock here and there through the oaks and the ashes, while the rain fell gently across the hay from a cloudage so low that to the south every peak along the Spanish border was concealed.

It was a home-coming, this second time. It still rained, the peaks were still invisible, the Comte de Bégouën still lived and was courteous with his thin wrists and long dry hands over the counterpane,

the hens still scratched and cackled, the pigeons flew, and the women raked another season's hay between the showers. The cherry tree was again in blossom outside the hollow of limestone uvulae which gave access to Les Trois Frères, and the large stripy lilac flowers of tall *Geranium nodosum* were out once more in the shadow of the rock and under the drip from the bushes; and I had now seen the cave, had been underground three hours, and had climbed up the iron ladders and emerged into the heat of a thundery evening, and walked back over the swathes of hay, and I now dried my hands, while Louis Bégouën sat in the door of his car and changed back from his cave boots into bedroom slippers.

The three brothers discovered this cave, which bears their name, in 1914. In a gully near the rough lane out of Montesquieu the small river Volp emerges from the limestone, sometimes a flood, sometimes a trickle, on the way to join the Garonne; not a great way up the lane, which runs parallel to the ridge, over to the right, the Volp drives underground. Between entrance and exit spread the two complicated and lengthy cave systems of Tuc d'Audoubert and Les Trois Frères, on the Bégouën estate. In 1912 the brothers had pushed along the Volp into the Tuc d'Audoubert, had landed on a beach and climbed and crawled above river level, and found, at last, nearly half a mile in, three astonishing, now world-famous bison modelled in high relief out of natural banks of clay. Not far away heel prints made by a dancing adolescent were still visible in the clay, and clay *phalli* lay forgotten and forlorn on the floor of the cave after the best part of twenty thousand years.

Once, no doubt, the cave of Tuc d'Audoubert was joined to Les Trois Frères upstream, though now the two systems appear to be divided and divorced by thirty or forty yards of clay filling; and once the Volp ran through Les Trois Frères before taking a lower route.

When I first looked without Louis Bégouën's guidance for the modern way into Les Trois Frères, I had climbed past the entrance, up through hazels on to the ridge, into a rough little parkland of rock and trees and walls and glades and lanes looking across to the church of Montesquieu-Avantès. It was up on this plateau that the three brothers first entered their cave, vertically, down a pot, down a rope, one day in 1914; and it was not until 1918 that they had made a full exploration of its galleries, creeps, crawls, squeezes, slides, slithers, and corridors.



Particular engravings and a few particular circumstances stay in the mind from Les Trois Frères: it is a big, but not (in the sense of Niaux or Bédheillac) an enormous cave, and it is not very beautiful, though one remembers stalactites now and again, and one smooth, sparkling, milk-chocolate-coloured cascade of flowstone; also two halls, one lofty, one smaller, which are crossed *en route*. Yet in this swart, compressing cave, through a dwarf's iron door, and a squeeze hole, and down iron ladders, you drop decidedly into the penetralia of ritual served by art, or contained in art. Penetralia are the 'innermost parts of a temple or shrine', the places into which you penetrate with suitable awe; and it is a word which suggests the unending and the labyrinthine, and constriction, and narrowness and ultimacy. Here from the foot of the third ladder you go through a confusion of rough corridors, high and low, wide and intensely shadowed or grimly confined. Bats, invisible and like a faint breeze, go past your face. One could well think of a Magdalenian boy, such a boy as the one who left his dancing heel-prints in Tuc d'Audoubert, giving way to terror, and rooting himself against another step after he had squeezed, climbed, descended, stooped, crawled, tripped, knocked himself and skinned himself on this dolorous, ill-lit journey to the end of the cave, to the engraved animals and the black-painted superintendent figure of its horned deity or spirit.

For a long way the walls are too reticulated or too calcified and rough for drawing or engraving. Then suddenly a red hand, a few red signs are encountered, a track of spots along the wall. The floor slopes downward, a wavy, water-smoothed, water-furrowed passage, at one time, for the Volp. Where there is clay on the floor, it shows the footprints of modern pilgrims since 1918 — including, as Louis Bégouën points out with a forefinger, the pits made by the high heels of a recent visitor who insisted that she could manage Les Trois Frères as easily as the Rue de la Paix — just as she was (she managed indeed without a trip or a stumble, steadying herself at the more awkward points with hands tapering to the longest red fingernails).

A 'chapel' on the right: we have come to a large, more or less oval domed hall, have climbed into a tunnel, which we have left slipping sideways between stalagmite doorposts, as they seem; and here, waist high on a small flow of calcite, a lioness has been drawn (in black) and engraved: her long body — two feet six inches from

head to tail — curves across the rock, the clawed feet are distinct, and the line of her back, the lines of her tail: her head seems to have been battered, hammered, deliberately, ritually; black lances and engraved lances stick into her flank, and below her tail a man's hand and arm have been engraved. Also with her there appears an engraved lion cub. When the lioness was discerned for the first time, in 1918, Louis Bégouën noticed one small tool of flint tucked into a hole in this flow of calcite; it was — a fair inference, at any rate — the engraver's tool used on the lioness and her cub; and it lies now in the Bégouëns' private museum in Louis Bégouën's house, across the fields from his father's manor house.

I had picked it up, earlier that afternoon. It fitted comfortably between my forefinger and my thumb.

These are not the only lions. The cave now enlarges to a second hall, too cavernous for a pair of carbide lamps. Here there had been a collapse from the outside world of the Pleistocene: into this natural trap, long since closed, animals had tumbled to their death, including a young bison whose fractured skeleton is set up in the Bégouën museum, and a reindeer whose broken jawbone lies there on one of the shelves. Here also Louis Bégouën is still excavating in the huge tumble of clay. Great bones stick out of the face of his excavation, and the tools he uses are kept above the path, in subterranean safety, in a niche in the rock. But the lions. Feet stick to the clay, suck at the espadrilles I am wearing instead of boots; and on one side of the passage we slither to a standstill in front of owlish lion heads — if the interpretation is correct — large oval ears above (I write of the clearer of the two), large round encircled eyes staring at us from the rock.

Louis Bégouën did not take his visitors this time by the difficult passage to that last portion of a side gallery where a pair of Snowy Owls and an owllet are engraved. We climbed instead, then descended by rough steps he and his brothers had cut into a flowstone cascade, and came into a clean-floored chamber, and sat — below a multitude of engravings.

Did I know we were *there*? I did not, though I should have guessed it. In this chamber Louis Bégouën keeps a special apparatus for the better viewing of image after image, animal superimposed upon animal — a long tube of red rubber ending in a square metal reflector and another burner. The reflector was now tarnished a



little by the subterranean air. He blew out one lamp, fixed the tube to it and lit the burner at the reflector end of the tube, and we began our examination — our selective examination — in this and that recess, of figures which seem coarse and slack in the Abbé Breuil's laborious tracings of them, whereas *in situ* they are often strong, lively, and persuasive, no less than engravings in Les Combarelles.

A bison's head shows up on the edge of a panel: his horns lie back behind his eye, his long clear tongue curves out, licks at the rock. His head rests on the engraving of a tiny ibex from the Pyrenees; and within the outline of his body and limbs, what a miscellany, what a muddle of horses, stags, reindeer, masked humans or deities, ibex, and other bison, and a rhinoceros! It is like a muddle of string performing in a nightmare, this superimposition of centuries — of whole epochs, according to our quickened calculation of time.

A second huddle of engraved animals, horses, bison (bull bison with tails copulatively raised), deer, and a brown bear with wound spots over his body under the long undulating frontier of his back, a bend of death and a look of death about him, and lines of blood pouring, or rather squirting, from his mouth.

The reflector moves again in the silence and inside this core of darkness it throws shadow into the lines, into the soft muzzle, the eyes, the antlers, of an excellent reindeer, although this reindeer seems also to have the horns of a bison; the light shifts over an entanglement of lines, wavers up, across, and down — down to a crouching 'human', composite or chimera, no longer than a reindeer's head. This 'human' stretches out a bison's forefeet, turns round a bison's head over a bison's back (yet this head *knows*, is *knowing*); his posterior is human, his knee human, his single hind foot is bestial; and under a half-bestial stomach a half-bestial sinewy pizzle is erect. Many of these animals have been struck with javelins or marked with spots along the flank. Bison always predominate — Les Trois Frères is above all a bison cave, a chantry of the life and plenty and death of bison.

In the midst of another collection of the centuries, chiefly of bison again (though the figures include woolly rhinoceros, horse, ibex, reindeer), occurs another, though less impressive bison-man, a bison-sorcerer, a bison-stalker, or bison-deity — human feet, human legs, human penis, half-erect, then with bison upper parts, forefeet as arms, bison head and bison horns, though he seems to be holding

in one fore-hoofed arm a musical bow which he plays — or seems to play — by holding it up to his mouth. (A dancing man performs on such a string instrument on one of the slabs from the Grotte de la Marche. It is like the *gora* played by the Bushmen, who make their mouth serve as a resonance chamber for the string). If the figures here are intentionally grouped, this bison-man seems to approach or dance towards an animal made of a reindeer's body and of a bison's head which is turned around to watch. The body ends in a distinct vulva; and a pregnant woman, ill-drawn, stands in profile above this animal's hindquarters.

Here the artist-sorcerer, the artist-priest, sets in one group the fertile expectancy of two of the principal species of the Magdalenian chase and livelihood, and of his own species as well.

We crouch and squeeze, and one of us treads on the rubber tube, the light going out just as we begin to descry an assortment of Magdalenian reindeer; it is lit once more, sizzles, burns clear, and these creatures stand and look and crouch and run, drawn with as great a virtuosity, almost, as the cattle of Teyjat (so I begin contradicting myself, after all, about the sheer art of the animals of the Cave of the Three Brothers — which are not so late, by any means, or so literal, as the black bestiary of Niaux).

Sitting back again on the damp floor, Louis Bégouën asks, 'Have you spotted him? Have you seen him?'

I had not seen him; and though familiar with *Les Trois Frères* by photographs and descriptions, I had been too possessed by the circumstances and by the drawings to realize where we had come to, exactly — to realize we were in the penetralia; in that most famous of all 'sanctuaries' of palaeolithic art and ritual; that famous small place of gothic fluting and vaulting; and Louis Bégouën now stood up to his full considerable height, slowly raised the second lamp, the one not attached by the rubber tube to the reflector, lifted it to his shoulder and over his head, the light rising strongly up the rock until twelve feet or so up the surface it reached the black figure of the Sorcerer, the Shaman, or rather the Superintendent Deity of this cave, the isolated celebrated enigma out of the past. In the carbide illumination it is chiefly the human legs and body, bent forward and outlined in black paint, that one detects — legs, body and black



animal tail and the profile of testicles and of a curved (and circumcised?) human penis which is placed quite naturally — accurately, though it may not seem so — underneath the tail. By contrast, and in contradiction to his image in books, his engraved beard, his engraved animal face with round eyes, hairy animal ears and branchy antlers are quite indistinct from below, and lack colouring.

After all one has heard and thought, how *little*, though prominent he is, the one painted figure above these engravings of the Sanctuary! How little his two-foot-six on the height of the limestone!

Louis Bégouën observes a ritual of his own — of sitting here on the sanctuary floor, thinking, being silent or exchanging thoughts with his visitors (who are not so frequent, though they have varied from English painters to prehistorians of all countries, and the lady with the red nails and high heels, and the plump, exiled Emperor of Indo-China); and there we sat and were silent, sat and spoke quietly, exchanged thoughts in this Gravettian and Magdalenian cave in company with the two carbide lamps on the rock beside us; if we stopped talking, the silence was entire and palpable, surrounding us as water surrounds fish. There was nothing, not a drip of water; nothing at all, save now and again the slightest gurgle inside the lamps; no sound, and no scent except the slightest most even smell of dampness and of carbide on the still air. No sound also on the return journey, save our own footfalls and slithers, and the tinkling of the chains of the two lamps.

Then up the ladders, and out, as I have written, to the evening's thundery warmth which pressed against the skin, and to the smell of hay. If bats were souls or spirits, they could be all that is left, other than the record of their emotions on the wall, of the initiates, the shamans, the artists, of this cave. (Plate facing page 128.)

Turning the pages of an album of pictures of cave art, it is that superimposition in the sanctuary of Les Trois Frères and other caves, that string muddle, that seemingly careless maze of lost figures, which worries the appreciator who is used to the elaborate coordinations and compositions of art. Remember, though, how an ikon or an altarpiece — or a sign-post — may be painted and repainted; remember the procreative purpose of these engravings, remember the lengths of sheer time through which this natural sanctuary may have been used, visited, revered. And think also, if

you were to take a flint burin and engrave with it a new figure on top of the darkened existing medley of a panel, how your new line would appear to make at first, and for some while, the one entirely clear, sharp, fresh, representation across the wall.

What are — or were — these caves? Storehouses of animal life, and not only that but places visited under guidance by the initiate into the full life of the tribe, or by the candidate for the high degree of ritual artist and hierarch? Sometimes one or the other, it would be a fair statement; sometimes both. There are 'storehouses' easy of access, and difficult of access; little storehouses, and great metropolitan storehouses, a Lascaux, a Font-de-Gaume, Altamira, Castillo; with the differences of a pilgrimage chapel or parish church and an abbey church or cathedral. Not only long and difficult and frightening and even dangerous ways of access testify to the secrecy of such shrines. Small ones, in shallow caves not far from daylight, may regularly have been shut, blocked, and hidden between visits. After he had found his way into the little mammoth cavern of Bernifal by a vertical shaft, Denis Peyrony searched for the original entrance, and found it blocked, deliberately, as he thought, with stones, and sealed and hidden just as it had been left by its shaman-artists in Magdalenian times. He removed the stones, and there was an easy level gangway into the cave.

In Australia there are caves of incense-images which the pilgrim can reach, under a roof two feet from the floor, only on his back, by journeys in and out made memorable afterwards by the kangaroo ticks bedded in his arms and thighs and calves and backside. In Australia there are caves inhabited by ancestral ghosts. Candidates for the degree of medicine man are taken into the caves and shining things are displayed to them on the wall, or they sleep outside the caves and are carried in by the ancestral ghosts and given magical stones. Was it in like manner only the rarer postulants for the high degree who made more hazardous journeys and longer journeys into water caves such as Tuc d'Audoubert or Montespan? Were other caves, so liberally engraved and painted, short or long, visited by the initiates or confirmation candidates of the tribe — and also by tribesmen and the artist graduates — for huntsmen's festivals of increase and plenty?

Les Trois Frères may leave no doubt about the sacramentality of caves; but it would be wrong to explain every cave in which there



are paintings and engravings by one single unvarying formula. Ritual and magic, no doubt a mythology as well, all had their demands which we can never interpret accurately or recover in detail. What was the nature, what were the functions of that Superintendent Deity of this Cave of the Three Brothers? What was his name? What myths were spun about him?

The questions suggest, upon second thoughts — but are none the worse for it — the rhetoric of *Urn-buriall* or *Ozymandias*, or the adventures of a man of earth and blood into the Underworld.

## Magdalenian Men, Aurignacian Hands

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TUC D'AUDOUBERT escaped me; that was my regret on this long day which ended as it started, upon the terrace of Louis Bégouën's manor-house. The journey to the clay bisons by boat and crawl and ladder was too strenuous for this one of the Three Brothers in his health at that time. His back was troubling him; and we lazed and drank wine and knocked ants out of biscuits, and talked of Altamira, and observed how Pyrenean hail had split branches on every tree around the house, and read the curious comments in the visitors' book of *Les Trois Frères* and *Tuc d'Audoubert*, in which archaeologists now and again had revealed the most vestigial or conventional of inner lives or philosophies.

I knew that the cave at Montespan, which was not so far away, would also escape me, that I should not be able to plunge through its waterlock and examine the headless clay figure — lay figure — of a bear riddled with javelin thrusts, in the manner of that brown bear engraved in the Sanctuary of the Cavern of the Three Brothers. Still, I had seen the exact model of the clay bison of *Tuc d'Audoubert* in the museum at Toulouse, and it was hardly sour grapes to say that both these bison and the bear, again, were poorish art, if fascinating archaeology.

Grateful also as I was for *Les Trois Frères* and moved and possessed as I was by that long subterranean pilgrimage, I wanted now a different sustenance — the fine painting, I thought, of Marsoulas, the black or bloody hands of Gargas and Gargas's fantasia of coloured cave-gothic or cave-baroque, and the extreme solitude and giant scale of Labastide. I was reckoning on all these before crossing into Spain.

Marsoulas is not much of a cave, and has no great charm of situation. It is a cleft, not very long, not very wide, neither remote nor much involved in today's life. It does not by any means fit the concept of tortuous and difficult and dangerous ways to the paintings of ritual and magic. No cave could less resemble *Tuc d'Audoubert* or



Les Trois Frères, or Niaux. Of course it is not always possible to tell how a cave was entered so anciently, but I would guess there has never been a very long or very twisty or very dangerous passage to the bison of Marsoulas. Like Bernifal, this cave was perhaps blocked and unblocked according to need. A guide now takes you into Marsoulas which offers you nothing *féerique*; but provides instead, without electricity, or crowds, or pressure, engravings and paintings, most of them ticketed and numbered, which can at least be studied face to wall, with time enough to consider them and grasp them, and consider them once more.

All the same, I think I can give no cheerful account of Marsoulas; and if that is so, it is partly the fault of St Giron. I had driven up from St Giron, and this rather tired little town had spread its influence over the day. In 1787 Arthur Young came to St Giron. It was 'a sink from which an English hog would turn with disgust'. The inn he stayed in was 'the most execrable receptacle of filth, vermin, impudence and imposition that ever exercised the patience or wounded the feelings of a traveller'. At any rate it was dead a hundred and sixty-eight years later. It was stone dead. On the Place des Poilus — what a name for the main square — no one sat at the green-striped tables, and the chairs were piled up against the wall of a hotel which began its mornings like an old lady drowsy and pompously out of fashion. Talk of our English Sunday! Even the river along the alley of plane trees is tired. An emanation of this old bore of a town spread along the road and spread up through the woods to Marsoulas — to the village. The road was dull, the woods were repetitious, the air was hot and close and dismaying; and the guide, when she was discovered and cornered in the *cabine téléphonique*, was too busy. At least she was cooking, and her husband was carrying hay against the likelihood of a storm — another storm — along the half-invisible Pyrenees.

She would come in two hours; and if there are times when one could wait with pleasure for two hours under a railway bridge in the rain, this morning was not one of them, and Marsoulas was no more exciting than an arch under a railway bridge in the rain in Sunderland, or Birmingham, or Pittsburgh. I bathed in a pool along a half-dry stream under the village. I washed off the thunder sweat, I cut my heel on half a bottle in the clear limestone water, I brushed away the flies — honest cleggs or horse-flies; I contemplated the dullness of

the woods of Marsoulas, and fetched the guide (she was still there, at least), discovering from her that my half-dry stream was fed in part from the cave, which had been only a few yards away from the pool with the broken glass.

There were two minutes to walk from the road, the stream on one side, a field of corn on the other; there was a slope to be climbed, like a railway embankment, overgrown with hazels. Pulling ourselves up by roots and branches we were there, in a gash so regular that it seemed artificial, a siding, a gash sideways along a rough inclined plane of rock, leading to a triangular corridor walled across in a glum way with black sheets of iron, in which the guide opened a small black door. It reminded me of going to an exhibition of Cézanne in a French town, in an art gallery black as a widow, wherever black could be applied; not half so gay as an undertaker's shop outside, filled with dead men's green foliage of wire and glass beads. Light came into the acute angle of the cave, and revealed the little numbers obligingly set there against each of the somethings to be examined.

I looked for the great red-and-black bison of Marsoulas, which has a red eyeball; and which old Emile Carthailac was the first to celebrate, in 1902, fresh from admitting himself to have been wrong altogether about cave art for twenty obstinate years. Breuil had copied it in August 1902, and his copy shows one of those uncommon bison, it had seemed to me, which the artist made into something superior to a hump or lump on four legs.

If this firmly, solemnly painted beast a few yards along from the iron door was properly visible in 1902, he was almost invisible now, fifty-three years later, in 1955.

In the early days of discovery Breuil spoke of the paintings of Marsoulas as distinct and even fresh, in spite of condensation and the damage done to them by modern visitors. Now it was hard enough to trace the strong line of black pigment enclosing the red contours of a bison eight feet from tail to muzzle; it was now hard to see, and impossible to feel, the grace of a profile drawn as firmly and very much as if it had been landscape, as if it had been a ridge of the Petites Pyrénées over which the bison grazed. If bison in other caves look puny and powerless, this long animal involved in its own animality must have been the very image of power.

If they say that the polychrome paintings of Lascaux are fading,





Niaux: Wild Horse.





already, I believe it. Others are fading. They have faded in Font-de-Gaume, in Pech-Merle, in Bédheilhac, and here in Marsoulas. But why should it be difficult to preserve these oldest paintings of the world, to fix them, glaze them, if need be, in some careful cunning way, before they disappear in this sad manner within a century of reappearing? Why was this masterpiece abandoned, for example, this bison of all bison, which seems — or seemed — to stand in the long grass directing a red eye of bison-consciousness and bison-indifference on to man?

Further along the left wall a smaller, *pointilliste* bison is in much better state. His reddish-brown face projects, yet withdraws into massive forequarters indicated by hundreds of spots of red ochre, laid on subtly in lines to indicate his volume.

Yer in Marsoulas it was not the bison, after all, not the sinuous designs large and long and bold, of a red colour, that gleam in torch-light along the wall (Azilian superimpositions which, if they were not so large, would suggest to me plants with opposite and plants with alternative leaves), not the horses nor an engraved reindeer nearly as perfect as the bovines of Teyjat, which plucked at the mind. It was the men, the little men, the little chance scratchings, full-face, side-face, so appealing, so crude, so unconventionalized.

Palaeolithic men, in their own image, their own features, are not quite so uncommon, or quite so 'lost in the uncomfortable night of nothing' as books too often suggest. We know something of their look, their hair style, even their clothes and ornaments, from scratchings in caves and on slabs, as well as from statuettes and reliefs. Perhaps the fat Venuses, the Venus of Willendorf or the Venus of Laussel, for example, work too much in our fancies by suggesting that all the women of palaeolithic *Homo sapiens* were squat, bosomy and buttocky, and large-bellied. To conclude from some carvings or drawings that all Upper Palaeolithic women were ultra-pneumatic would be like concluding from the Sunday papers that all modern women were boyish or elegantly pneumatic. Other carvings equally show grace and charm of figure as we understand them, and beauty of face, in the women of the caves or the steppes. Men and women also look with individuality of being from the slabs of the Grotte de la Marche. In a cave, here in Marsoulas, for example, we look at a bison, a reindeer, a horse, drawn with such an affectionate

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*Opposite.* Niaux: in the Salon Noir.

and subtle naturalism, we look at a small squiggle of a human face, remark its crudity, remark the artist's indifference to his kind; and explain to ourselves that often great historic masters have only drawn well those objects which called out their own idiosyncratic blend of skill and emotion. A second look, and there is more to say.



*Head engraved on cave wall, Marsoulas*

In Marsoulas, one little face especially: with round ear, round eyes, long nose, and long thin mouth. What is he?

I descried a likeness in him to the staring cave lion of Les Trois Frères, who has double-circled eyes and rounded ears as well; though if this is a man in a lion mask, he has none the less one of those physiognomies encountered again and again along the Pyrenees, a nose flattish, with wide openings, a slit of a mouth, features spreading flatly across a flattish plane. I saw this rather sad little phiz of Marsoulas sitting upon hunched shoulders in a frontier café up in the mountains, on the way to Spain; and next to him was a face of another palaeolithic type, with a re-entrant or concave line, almost a right angle, from tip of nose to top of forehead; mouth and chin jut forward in this type as far as most of the nose and brow are pushed backwards (many of the faces of the slabs of La Marche are of this kind). A third type bends over objects on a market-stall on Monday morning in St Giron, when that centre of sad or tired dullness comes to life down all the streets and under the plane trees along the river. The lower part of his head (in profile) is wider and heavier than the domed top of the head, which would fly off almost into space. The back of his dome curves up, his forehead drops more



directly. Furrows stratify the forehead, and a great flattish, hooky stalactite of a nose, like the nose of William Wordsworth, hangs down across his mouth. I watched him. I saw him, his counterpart, in town after town, and knew that he as well had escaped, had descended from the rocky surface of Marsoulas, by origin another of the faces I had made out. And why not? 'There is every reason to believe that a fair proportion of the later inhabitants of Europe' — let alone a fair proportion of the modern inhabitants of an area so much inhabited palaeolithically — 'have drawn, in the network of their descent, upon the stocks of Upper Palaeolithic times'. So a modern, responsible archaeologist declares.

I think in Marsoulas there are a dozen of heads. I found six of them (not all were ticketed); and within the type I felt a person, a personality, in each one.

Sadness seems a characteristic of these cave faces; and solemnity. And since men of Magdalenian times no doubt laughed as much as we do, I indulge myself by seeing in these faces artists and shamans of very high degree a little sadly contemplating a futurity of extinction. The small one with the sad round eyes — I indulge myself by making him the Master of the Eight-foot Bull Bison — contemplates the everlasting time of that second death when memory of himself and his bison and his cave and his art and his existence and the existence of all his fellow artists and shamans would disappear, and — to drag a favourite quotation, or two quotations, out of Sir Thomas Browne — when nothing any more would 'sweeten their habitations in the land of moles and pismires', through all of 'that duration that maketh pyramids pillars of snow'. We have exhumed them, nevertheless; but I do not see a smile, on that account, spreading across the little stony features in Marsoulas.

As I searched for more of the dozen faces, penetrating along the base of this tallish, narrow awkward prism of a cave to a far point where the soft loess of the floor begins to go downhill into a deeper dark, towards the stream, the guide grew at last too impatient.

Gargas and the Hands, and Labastide and Lourdes, now lay ahead, though outside Marsoulas it is Altamira you think of, and the Spanish bison; as Carthailac and Breuil, old and young, thought of them when they sat outside among the hazels, half a century ago, after a day's deciphering and copying.

Gargas was some thirty miles ahead; and if St Girons was now luckily behind, rain, rain, and more rain, endless rain, pelted and obliterated the valley of the Garonne. St Girons could not be blamed, it was Atlantic rain, of good English, Irish, Cornish, Devonshire kind, or at any rate a first cousin, the product of moist air sweeping in from the Bay of Biscay, sweeping across Les Landes where every dry sloping pine tree weeps its resin into a *pot de résine*, and condensing at last against the mountains and turning this northern flank of these (ah yes, invisible) Pyrenees into forest.

Indeed rather than blame St Girons, it had given me — or rather a gipsy-like woman in Monday morning's market had given me — a most succulent, frail, delicately blended cheese, in contrast to the two stale eggs it had given Arthur Young in 1787 — for twenty francs. Half a pint of whey had leaked from this cheese into the tin; I ate it, slowly, after unwrapping rosettes of long narrow brown chestnut leaves in which she had packed it. I ate that miracle of confection, milky, creamy, soft, in a grove of chestnut trees below Gargas, while the rain dripped and long liquescent tinned-apricot slugs like pieces of stalactite gone soft extended their trails across the wet ground and up the wet, gnarled, girthy chestnut trunks. And in Gargas soon after I saw the advantage of the rain. Like Spanish caves, Gargas is damp (the Atlantic is now a mere hundred or so miles away as the wind flies). More so, Gargas is wet. There are pools on the floor, 'gours' or rimstone pools lipped round, as the water in them overflows, by deposits of calcite; and the air inside the cave is always, or frequently, saturated, always moist enough to make the colours glow.

Caves are not just caves any more than all cheese is mousetrap. They are like houses outside and inside. Inside they depend upon plan, ornament, space; outside everything about them depends upon the natural architecture of the entrance, upon a drama, or happiness, of location. Their character varies no less than the character of houses or of men or of roads or of cheeses; and I was glad that the cave archaeologists of France and Spain were always too busy about the art and the archaeology to say anything of the character — especially the external character — of the subterranean art galleries. Each new cave is an adventure that may turn out well or badly, may be dull or satisfying, aesthetically and romantically good or dismal; and the last minutes before reaching a new cave are always ones of



excitement. The lanes out of Aventignan — the village of Gargas — are well signposted, all the way up to the narrower track or lane pointing direct to the cave and running like a terrace along the slope of a hill. Here a notice bade one to *klaxonner* again and again; but on this wet day in June, before the season, there were no other cars along the track, no other cars in the neat car park under ilex trees against a rocky vegetative slope and next to a neat red-ochre hut, and another hut under the dripping leafage which housed an engine and a lighting plant.

The guide was a little disconsolate. He waited, in hopes of others he could relieve of their francs; giving way at last, and cranking up his engine and boosting the light for the passage of a mere foreigner not likely to be as interested in his cave as he was himself (he is young, he knows about caves, and keeps in his hut a cupboard museum of his own finds).

Exterior neatness, exterior charm, but no exterior drama. Where was the cave? On the far side of a small front door under the trees, which opened into the hillside, into enormity, into space, into an Aladdin's cave or pantomime cave. I have never read *Huon of Bordeaux*, but what happens in French mediaeval romance? Do hills open, as they opened in England and Ireland? The shepherd of Mr Brown, of Winterbourne-Basset in the very Anglo-Saxon county of Wiltshire, encountered subterraneously the people of the secret commonwealth: 'He says that the ground opened, and he was brought into strange places underground, where they used musicall Instruments, violles, and lutes, such (he sayd) as Mr Thomas did play on.' The ground opened, the rock opened, the door opened at Gargas; there was no noise of violles and lutes, it is true, there was no blue-bellied dragon from Hatton Garden curling his tail over rubies and pressing his belly against golden cups; but there was colour indeed. There was not a dirty strait and narrow way, but a large, wide, fairly lofty hall, allowing the eyes and mind to expand. The floor is smooth, level, more or less, and free of mud; the colours are green, wonderful pinks, and flame — orange flame — upon grey; one goes from great shallow hall to hall, from hand to hand stencilled on the rock, the guide flashing an extra light upon hands surrounded with red — mutilated hands, most of them — and the red glows as though it were luminous blood. All of the colours glow.

There are caves which by the steady trampling of visitors have

become squalid as a mechanics' lav at the back of a concrete garage in Birmingham; but not Gargas, though Gargas has been on show for centuries. Who scratched in such fine old lettering across the rock under the Aurignacian meanders he ignored ADNADEVS SALVTARIS?

These meanders and these hands demand one's time in Gargas. The guide led the way from the duck-boarded path of this great damp cavern to hand after hand, stencilled with red, stencilled with black, to hands isolated, in pairs, in groups, to meanders or 'macaroni', primitive scrawlings, finger scrawlings, in the once soft mud of a sloping roof; to engravings and superimpositions, deer, horses, bovines, ibex; to a black bison now little more than an outline, though his tail is still evocatively arched; and for all the colour, all the sense of width and room, for all the form, like someone's fancy of a clean, coloured underground powerhouse in another planet, it is the hands and the meanders which leave one possessed and fascinated.

When they excavated in the vestibule of Marsoulas, they found levels from Gravettian through Magdalenian to Azilian — or immediately post-palaeolithic. Here as well excavations proved the magnetism of Gargas over a long stretch of time. There were lumpy Mousterian tools, Aurignacian tools, Gravettian tools; and at least the black bison proves that Magdalenian man still haunted the cave, though it offered little of the kind of surface he required. Like the meanders, the hands are early Aurignacian (a dating arrived at by datable falls of rock bearing such hands and by the study of superimpositions); they belong, that is, to the infancy of the art of *Homo sapiens*, the infancy of our own art; and between the two of them (meanders and hands go together in several caves, in Pech-Merle, remember, and in Baume-Latrone and Altamira) there appear the beginnings of colour and line. If painting goes back still further to painting the body with earth colours for ritual dances, for corroborees, one can see how it leaves the body, which is perhaps the original canvas, for the wall. A man wishes his hand to be black or red; he lays it flat, he blows paint on to it from his mouth, he removes his hand, and look — a stencilled shape remains, a negative outlined in the colour he used, a power of the hand wonderfully transformed. He draws his finger along the clay or the mud: a line remains. He wiggles his finger on the wet clay, the line closes around a shape, the



shape suggests one of those objects which most fill his thoughts, most answer to his desires.

He withdraws his coloured hand, the stencil remains. He withdraws his tracing finger, the shape remains, is there, is divorced from himself. He can make another hand, he can repeat the shape. In either case art is born by this projection, this transference from self to surface, finger-tip or flattened palm to clay or to rock.

Pleased with hand-shapes, finding in them some power, some significance, he repeats them in shrines, he develops a technique, he signs himself on the rock. Stencilled hands survive in more than a dozen French and Spanish caves, outlined in red, in black, brown, violet, yellow, or white. If palaeolithic man in western Europe, as he developed his rituals with an art at once perceptive and imaginative, gave up this child's play or ritual use of the hands on the rock, other peoples retained it, and still retain it. Hands were stencilled on the rock in South Africa by Bushmen, at any rate by Southern Bushmen; Australians both print and stencil hands in caves and in rock shelters. In north-east Arnhem Land a man of the Murngin tribe will smear his hand in red ochre, and with open fingers press it on the rock, and then blow round the fingers and the hand a mouthful of white or yellow wash. So he signs himself with a red hand inside yellow or white. In other Australian caves hands are stencilled in white, in red, in black.

And why? If there was a clear answer for Australians or any other people in the world, it could do no more than suggest a possible answer for Aurignacians in France and in Spain. Gargas adds a complication as well: these hands in Gargas — or some of them — have their own peculiarity shared with hand-stencils in no other European cave: they are gapped, they are short of joints, short of fingers, and must have been stencilled from hands already mutilated. When the Abbé Breuil and Emile Carthailac began their study of the hands in Gargas in 1907 (no one had ever noticed them, or at least ever remarked on them, till the year before, though excavations had been made in the cave, on and off, for more than thirty years) they thought that in these glowing shapes there might only be a semblance of mutilation, that fingers might have been bent back while the pigment was blown on to the rock. They experimented. They made friends experiment as well, and found it impossible, with fingers curled back or under the hand, to get the same mutilated effect.

Why should Aurignacians have shortened their fingers? At least one knows that it has been done and is still done by other peoples, in Africa, America, Australia. Silhouettes of the kind have been found in Australian caverns. Indians of the prairie in America, hunters of the bison, ritually offered fingers of the left hand (sometimes a finger of the right hand). This was done by initiates, by the confirmation candidates of the tribe; but mutilation need not have been so messy or so grim with the Aurignacians of Gargas, if they behaved in the matter like some of the Southern Bushmen, who took a joint off the little finger of their babies before the child sucked and when the tiny finger bones were still soft, an operation — they did it with a reed — no worse or more horrifying than our own familiar rite of the circumcision of infants. These Southern Bushmen knew why they took a cut from the little finger. They thought it helped the child to thrive and live into manhood, they thought that all who in a proper way lacked this joint on the little finger would travel easily and safely when they died to a place where they could eat locusts and honey; whereas everyone whose little finger was improperly entire would have to make his journey over tough obstacles, on his head, to a place where he would have nothing to eat but flies.

If the finger joints were cut off in Aurignacian adolescence, it would at least have been no more extraordinary than the very many mutilations performed all over the world in the rituals of admitting children to man's estate — to a knowledge of the society's mysteries, myths, and ceremonies, and symbols.

The Magdalenians later on, to judge from drawings of men out of the Grotte de la Marche, seem to have practised circumcision — probably of initiates, as so often, and not of infants.

In Gargas and its halls and corners and nooks there are no fewer than a hundred and fifty hands, more of them left hands than right — which may not be so left-handed, so sinister, so secret or of mysterious ritual import, if the colour was not just blown from the mouth in the manner of North-East Arnhem Land, but blown through a tube held in the right hand, or smeared on the rock with the fingers of the right hand. As for the mutilations, they are mixed. The top two portions are missing on some hands from four fingers, on some from three fingers up to the forefinger, on some from little finger and third finger, on others from second finger and third. Both the negative of the hand and the surrounding colour are now, in



some instances, glazed with a flow of calcite; and, I repeat, how these red ochre surrounds glow, whether they are glazed or merely damp, among all the colours of Gargas, and how purposeful and how charged with humanity these hands seem, compared with the macaroni squiggles on the glacial clay, compared even with clay drawings of animals, or animals engraved here into the rock!

The cave narrows, a passage wriggles on to another entrance or exit in the hillside; from which you walk back to your starting-point along a path cut around the hill. It is this path, the panorama from this walk, this terrace, which completes one's feeling afterwards that Gargas is lodged or poised so lightly upon a high platform as not to be cavernous at all, but featherweight and free and happy — even on a wet day. The path moves through a scrub of box and oak, around, above, and below shoulders and pitted blocks of limestone; the hill continuing to fall steeply below the path, so that the suave fields, the different smooth colours of the valley underneath, the long parallels, the corn, the vines, hay reaped and half reaped, are brought energetically up to the foreground of vision. And bordered by a continuation of blue-green hills diminishing to smaller, bluer hills, and speckled with houses, and serving as a parade ground for Lombardy poplars, the levels underneath spread across the Garonne and extend far to a northward horizon beyond Montrejeau. First the shaggy and the steep and the tough, then the smooth, the sun-levelled — the rain had now stopped and the sun had reappeared — and the humanized.

The other way the river curved towards the old Roman spa of St Bertrand-de-Comminges, where St Bertrand's crocodile skin hangs in his celebrated cathedral of Notre-Dame.

The guide had taken his own short way back through the cave, through the hill, while I stayed on the path, as on a balcony giving a conspectus of all human endeavour.

## XII

### The Red Mare

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CAN I TELL YOU exactly what it was like that morning, that afternoon — how it was a dream of being lost inside an immensity quite unknown and full of threats — until the end? I felt as travellers must have felt on the way from London or a pompous park to Rome in the eighteenth century, so far from the Mall and the coffee-house and the glitter of Vauxhall, and the comforting steam and elegance of Bath, and the bland portico, and the familiarity of the English tongue.

Congential horrors, hail! So you said in prospect of the Alps, after too much order and reason; and the rain closed around you (as it closed around here, under the Pyrenees) and the noble Alps were transformed ignobly to rocks and dirt. 'Such uncouth rocks,' wrote Horace Walpole to his friend Richard West, 'and such uncomely inhabitants! My dear West, I hope I shall never see them again!'

I was of Walpole's mind, aiming for Labastide, though at moments I could see, because of the rain, neither rock nor inhabitant. The Pyrenees — I was under them, not surmounting them; but the road was getting worse, the clouds were getting darker, and lower, and more voluminous; the brief sunshine of Gargas had been swallowed up, the rain beat against the wind-screen and forced itself round the door. The road streaked and bumped ruthlessly, perspectively, into gloom; and the scene, so far as visibility allowed — when I turned off and stalked the Pyrenees direct — resembled less an adventure into France than one into Connemara or Mayo. Low steam-pudding shapes of mountain, low mammoths of mountain would show a long way ahead, across the wetness of the plateau I now traversed; but these shapes had lost their volume; they were vertical planes only, of lighter and darker blue. The clouds would divide and reveal another plane of mountain in blue matt pigment, further in, larger, taller, exceedingly tall. The clouds would shut, the exceeding tallness of blue would disappear again.



Nothing belonging to the human race was now in view, except an Irish cottage, alone, ahead, along the wet road, magically transferred to all this cosmic encirclement, all this panoramic, super-theatrical, all too genuine, all too intimidatingly existential gloom.

Then the road tilted, and from merely tilting, it began to drop. That was wrong. Wasn't I approaching mountains, in search of a village and a cave, and a painting inside the cave? And shouldn't the road have gone up, not so drastically down? It dropped; it dropped around bends, around dripping stooks of corn, it dropped again past fields of maize and hedges made of flat slabs of stone, visibility just enough to reveal that it was going to drop still more directly, through clouds that now drifted down below as well as around and above, like a lift, on to the wet roofs of Labastide, a thousand miles from anywhere and a thousand feet below the normal surface of the world.

It is one thing to find a village, smoke rising into the clouds from each chimney above each roof of glistening slates, another to find a cave by the village. It is one thing to be given instructions, by a Pyrenean farmer's wife, with a dubious, pitying, bedraggled shake of the head; another thing to follow the instructions.

'Go along the stream,' she ordered, 'till it disappears.' If that was the way to find the cave, what about finding the large ochre horse in the depths of the cave? I took to a lane running bend and bend with the stream, below another fence of stone rectangles; and with the stream and the lane descended still more into the depth of the world, hemmed still more by invisibility, anxiety, and rain; with only, at intervals, a green overhead intimation that mountain slopes rose immediately above. I was a little aghast, so far from home, so ignorant of where I should spend the night, so dependent on a car which could speak no French and which I had left in a dead end by the farm-house, so drawn in all of this dismay to inspect another mere painting in another mere hole in the ground. A special painting, it was true, a large black-and-red polychrome, one of the few of its kind between the Vézère and Altamira.

That lane! The filth of it (it took cattle between the village and the mountain)! The filth of that stream as well! The stream was the dull-coloured sewer of Labastide. A notice, hardly required, said *Eau non potable*. A few yards and another notice repeated the remark. Then an omen was vouchsafed. You will know (if you are a

gardener or a student of overgrown Victorian drives edged with holly and laurel and lumps of freestone) the few small flowers, so purple as to be almost black, carried by Dusky Cranesbill. Here was Dusky Cranesbill, wild and native, suspending its nearly black flowers, not over a vicar's boots, but over the nearly black water of this sewage-stream which ought to wind into the magic cave.

The sewer, the stream went faster and curved away downwards into mist. The lane curved the other way, upwards into mist, up mountain; and out of the invisibility a great vertical furrow appeared in the green side of the mountain, cut inward into darkness; the dirty water made a drop or two, a turn or two, and slid forward and vanished, rapidly under rock, below a great overarching canopy, which had shed boulders untidily around the stream. Another omen. Those poppies we call Welsh from their rare occurrence on the Welsh mountains, hung their wet yellow crumpled flowers among these boulders below the arch of rock, together with a pretty mauve-flowered plant with kidney leaves, like the Patrick's Cabbage of Kerry and south-west Ireland; and above the slit where the black sewage gurgled out of sight, hung dripping tufts of the true maiden-hair fern. A rat ran away by the edge of the stream, and I daresay the rat was wet through. Peering under the water arch, flashing a torch into the darkness, I decided that exploration downstream was feasible — among driftwood, tins, broken bowls, and bits of wooden box caught by the rocks: it was feasible, but this could hardly be the true cave of Labastide, described for the first time, works of art and all, in an old number of the *Illustrated London News* for 1932. This reality and that description were not in agreement. Where was a cavern huge and hollow — huge enough for Cacus, or Polyphemus, and their animals?

In brief, no cave, and no red horse, and nowhere at all to go except back into the car and up into the clouds, in search of a supper and of a bed that seemed altogether beyond any probability in Labastide. I had started back, angry with the rain, angry with caves, angry at myself at such a defeat; when cowbells sounded out of the mist overhead, above the point where the stream rejoined the lane. The sounds came lower and nearer. Two Frenchmen with five or six rain-spangled fawn cows took upon themselves solidity, out of the gloom.



They did not crack my skull, they did not scalp me with a flint knife or show surprise at a wet foreign figure in the rain and the now failing light. That was reassuring.

But the cave? He had not, said one of the farmers dubiously, been inside the cave for ten years: it was difficult (I knew it was not difficult, at all).

But where was the cave? It was dangerous, it needed much light, he said, and he looked doubtfully at the long torch sticking from my pocket; and said again he had not been inside for ten years.

But where, where *exactly* was the cave? How far was the cave? And would he show me?

It was — up there; and he half turned about and raised a long, brown, unshaven, wet face, and pointed with a long arm far above dripping hazels, up and up into the swirls of cloud. Instead of saying 'I'll show you', he shrugged to his companion, a bit irresolutely, and detached himself; and with the cow dog and the cows, dismal music coming again from their necks, the other one splashed away up the lane. Odd milk they must have if the cows ever drink of the *eau non potable*.

So the cave, in spite of everything; and we took to a slithery upward path, hundreds of feet up, through the hazels heavy with rain which hung from the leaves, and shone, and ran down the stems, and the twigs, and double-soaked my soaked clothing. Up and up, slide and clutch and slide, and up again to a lip of ground now level with our faces, and over the lip, and then, enormously, suddenly, a black funnel at our feet, diving away at an angle, a black throat, the spathe of a black arum lily, sloping, as I say, backward and downward into the mountain; at the bottom it was filled, altogether astonishingly, with blue mist lying down there like a pool. Never a cave excursion had had so startling a moment, or proffered an exterior so bizarre, so formidable, so captivating. We had climbed up to the stream's old entry into the netherworld, the stream after millions of years having carved itself a new level and cut or dissolved that new smaller slit of an entrance down by the rat and the Welsh poppies.

*Un cheval rouge*, I remarked, encouragingly, in a fourth-form French he could just comprehend, *dans la grotte?*

The farmer agreed, but showed no promise of descending the black slope into the blue mist and meeting whatever there might be beyond. It was difficult, he said, it was difficult. There is the cave, he

said, down there; as though he, for his part, had done quite enough. Ten years, he said once more, since he had last been inside the cave.

However, like wet bumble-bees we crawled down the flower, crawled down inside the spathe, a hundred, two hundred feet perhaps, into the pool of blue mist. Inside the mist, and inside the mountain a frail fence crossed the darkness of the throat of the cave, with a gateway, but no gate. So the cave of Labastide was not locked, though I had forgotten all about such a possibility. No. Beyond the fence the earth was damply ornamented with cow-pats, though neither cow nor bull nor Cacus nor Polyphemus was at home.

We needed a carbide lamp, but I had left mine in the car since I was out of carbide. We needed, said the farmer, looking at the torches again, some newspapers and a box of matches. Ahead, anyway, yawned the great increasing blackness of the cave, silent, and dry inside after the rain. Preferable to Lascaux, this occasion enclosed in the Mist of Unknowing, or to Pech-Merle, or even Gargas. The cave did not say *Enter me*; the cave was not harnessed (the fence across was only against cattle) or *aménagé* or kept. It said nothing, but glanced at us like a bison out of the tall summer foliage of a park tundra in the Ice Age, hardly bothering to notice intruders.

A little frightening, all the same.

Accounts of this cave of Labastide are meagre. I knew, though, a little of what to find and how far in to find it, I knew what to avoid. To be avoided — and there it was, there it began — was a gulf, a black profundity (exactly how deep?) stretching like a trench down mid-cave; but on the right was also a wide enough, easy enough ledge continuing beyond the range of an electric torch, with ups and downs, juttings and twistings. From the blue mist, and then the green light you always get near the entrance of a cave, along this huge stem of a rocky flower, I knew that a hundred and ninety-three yards ought to bring us, if the farmer did not turn back, to the chief treasure of Labastide — to the red horse, which I should find not on the wall, not on the roof (the roof was vastly above my head), but striding *across* the cave.

Try counting a hundred and ninety-three yards when you are feeling your way, with much too weak a light, across a slippery, sometimes hard, sometimes spongy, but always uneven floor.



I went on, I found nothing. I flashed the torch on the wall, I flashed it the other way and downwards, and the beams were too feeble to go far into the blackness of the chasm; I turned it upwards and the wavering beams were lost in the upper chaos.

Green daylight from the mouth of the arum lily had disappeared. The farmer was still there, the farmer occasionally muttered the



*Magdalenians, from Grotte de la Marche*

word *cheval*, and paused, and hoped I was giving up and turning back; and then he came on, not wishing to admit his uncomfortableness.

Still nothing. My light, turned on the floor, so that we could pick a way, showed us bones here and there; turned on this or that face of rock, it gave false alarms. But nothing, still nothing. A hundred and ninety-three yards is a long way in blackness, I repeat; it is a long count, and one loses count, like dropping a stitch in black wool.

Still nothing, and I remembered other vain searches in other, though less stagey caves, miles also beyond nowhere. I recall now as I think back to Labastide a sentence of Herman Melville's about the winged soul (but I was not winged at all) wending a wild way deeper and deeper into Time's endless tunnel, finding eternities before and behind, her last limit, he says, her everlasting beginning.

Yet the good omen of the wild Dusky Cranesbill had its proper consequences. I was ready to give up, and there it was — there,

suddenly, suddenly, a little away ahead on a vast boulder, taking definition out of the weighty and endless absence of light.

Our shelf or ledge along the right hand of the cave dipped, unexpectedly, and skewed us more towards the middle of an enormous chancel, and that first faint red shapelessness now appeared in our feeble beam; and, as I say, that red shapelessness took shape, mass, line, on the very large boulder — though boulder suggests a roundness of rock, and this was a great triangular lump which had been shaken at some remote period from the triangularity of the roof far above us. The boulder was large as a cottage — or so it seemed — facing down the chancel, though the cave continued deeper and deeper into Time's endless tunnel on the far side. The redness had by now resolved itself quite clearly into a horse, fifteen hands high, in black as well as red, tilted by its designer slightly across the rock, as though he had only been able to walk and draw according to the slope on the ground.

Rocks jutted from the damp filling of the cave and afforded seats almost opposite this cottage-block and this red horse; and we sat and we looked at the horse, fifteen hands high, six and a half feet from head to tail, as though we were sitting in the choir stalls of a cathedral, empty at midnight, on the Bishop's Throne, directing our torches on to the high altar. Was it a mare, or a stallion? I think a mare, I think in foal; drawn a little stiffly, yet strongly, without fumbling; a little faded, though the black enclosing lines of this creature's mane and tail, and breast, and fore-legs, and hind legs following natural lines down the rock, were all distinguishable enough.

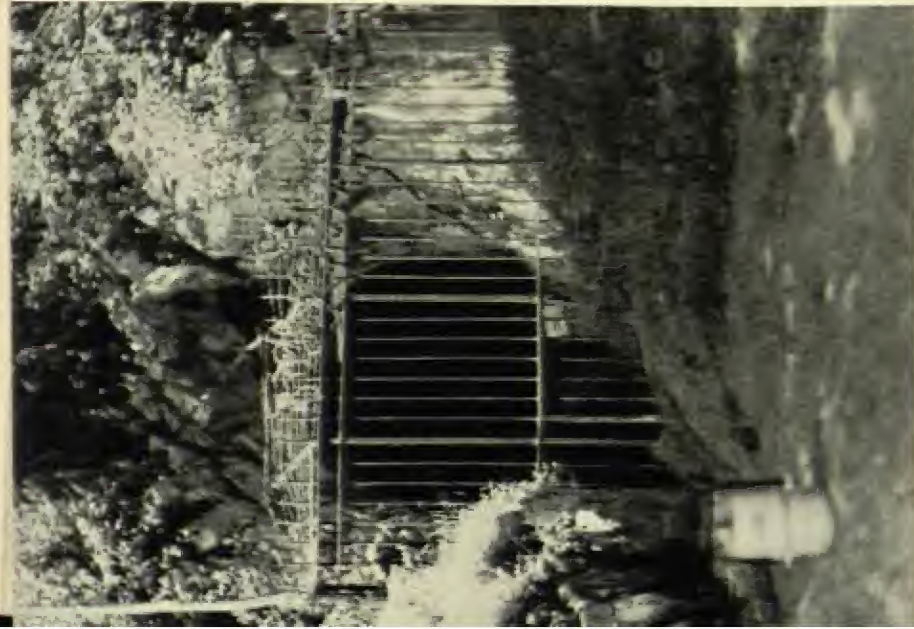
It comes, this animal, so arrestingly out of the blackness, out of the past; it stands, with whatever stiffness of attitude, so nobly and simply across the enormity of the cavern. I tried to draw its likeness, while the farmer came forward and squatted on the earth, and admired the great horse with a repetition of adjectives. There was no other noise except of waterdrops.

It was late now, and our lights were still more enfeebled, and I had no chance of finding the other figures, including a fiery engraving of a cave lion's head, and horses, and reindeer, and a wild goose, and I think two humans. The horse was enough. I picked up a few scraps of bone, heavy and smooth, on the way back, wiped them off against my thigh and put them to my tongue to see if they stuck a





Precipices of Peña el Moro, on the way to Covalanas.



The Entrance, Sanimamifié.



The Sacred Hill (Castillo).



little dryly, which for bones is a test of fossilization. I picked up a charred piece as well, sticking out from the earth below a broken floor of stalagmite; and at one point the light shone on the blood-red of a pocket of ochre on the ground.

Outside we climbed back into the rain, and down under the rain. The clouds were lower than ever on the mountain, pressing down the tinkle of cow-bells, and the wet hazel leaves slapped still more into my face, and the ends of my fingers grew more wet and white and cold.

The odd thing was that nothing — nothing in this wet, alien, far-away situation — appeared sinister any more. The rain soaked into me, I did not know where I should sleep; but I had found the horse, in circumstances which were unforgettable. The day was more Irish than ever, there was just light enough to see the village, to observe latticed haybarns, blue shutters and grey walls and slate roofs, pierced with little gabled dormer windows, and squatly surmounted with stone chimneys, and to mark the smoke from each chimney drifting through the rain.

Nothing mattered, everything appeared friendly and enjoyable. By comparison with this solitary exploration I would not have given a threepenny bit for Lascaux and all its bright creatures.

And I have thought of going back to Labastide, arriving when the sun is shining full blaze upon the Pyrenees and on the village and on the flowers and revealing all the ambience that was muffled and hidden that day; and of entering the cave with carbide lamps flaring and illuminating this red horse of the Magdalenians.

But it would never do. It would never be as exciting, as satisfying, a second time.

## XIII

### A Mixture of Lilies and Wax

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I DARESAY IT IS salutary to deflate one's self-satisfaction and exultations. The day after the Red Mare of Labastide I observed the Pyrenees on a fine morning at last; or rather the fore-hills of the Pyrenees, looking very much as if pounds of green sugar had been emptied in heaps along the edge of France. And I was in Lourdes — which could hardly be helped on the way to Spain — making for the pass above Oloron. The sun glittered now from bric-à-brac stalls; it would have glittered from the pavements, if a square millimetre of pavement could possibly have shown between the legs, the skirts, the robes of pilgrims, the men, the women, the superintendent priests; shabby, all or most of them, Irish, English, Italian, Dutch, German, American, milling to and fro like crowds before a cup tie; and also wearing favours. I parked by the kerb in the one empty space. I looked up.

#### SPECIALITÉ

VIERGES

LUMINEUSES

Garanties Lavable

It takes time to nose through the streets, to thread through the people; time to tear oneself from contemplating so many shops, so glossy, in such contradiction to the tattiness of the pilgrims, filled with such fancy objects — such a million of gaudy nothings in all colours and of all expensive cheapness, past marble tablets inscribed *MERCI* or *THANK YOU* in readiness for what may not happen, past these specialities, these luminous Virgins guaranteed washable, past the polythene bottles with coloured pictures of Bernadette Soubirous kneeling to the apparition of the Virgin, to be filled at her miraculous spring. It takes time to stop marvelling at the smart hard secular saleswomen in the shop doorways of this Coney Island of miracles and emotion, to stop marvelling at the hotels which grandly and stridently surmount the shops — the Hôtel de Galilee, Hôtel Ste-



Sacrement, Hôtel de Bethanie — best of all, Hôtel du Golgotha. And blessed be the camera shop with a yellow sign ST PATRICK'S KODAK. I forgot caves for a minute, in this *grand mouvement de foule*.

Signs point the way to the Cave of Miracles; but are hardly required, since the way is indicated by the coming and going of mankind and womankind, by the returning and advancing international ant-trails of priests and pilgrims, the more and more cripples pulled in Edwardian bath-chairs coming to bits and fitted with bicycle wheels, the only *things* shabby in the regular equipment of Lourdes, in contrast to the sentiment of the whole — yes, it is half the right word, or three quarters — the whole *business*.

Two descriptions by Zola in a lame novel yet biting document about Lourdes, which perhaps a few old-fashioned cynics in the town keep in dark shelves in a back room: 'This holy Kermesse', this holy fair, 'this spot of abomination and perdition, transformed into a huge bazaar, where everything is traded, masses and souls alike'.

Zola sees Lourdes in 1891, Erasmus, in the grace and strength of his mind, sees Walsingham, in Norfolk, in 1511, the miraculous shrine of the Virgin, the 'most frequented place throughout all England', served by a middle kind of clergy between monks and secular canons, amphibiously comparable to the beaver, say the characters of his dialogue — or the crocodile. Relics are exhibited — milk of the Virgin, like ground chalk mixed with white of egg, and a finger of St Peter huge enough to have designated him as a giant; and all is bright and shining, and from these bank holidays and crowded inns of pilgrimage, from Walsingham as from Canterbury or Compostella, the pilgrims return decorated with all that corresponds to the factory fairings of Lourdes — 'covered with scallop shells, stuck all over with figures of lead and tin, decorated with straw necklaces and bracelets of serpent's eggs'.

But I thought of caves as I came near the gardens and the river (deflected to make room for a million visitors a year) and the walls of rock and the marble groups of icing-sugar and the wealthy, upstanding churches of icing-sugar. Caves and deity, caves and death, caves and life. Caves evilly and benignly inhabited. Caves and wonder. The 'Water-in-Going' cave of the Maoris at Waitomo, in which luminous grubs are stars in the black roof above a lake. Caves for trolls, giants, dragons, fairies, witches, robbers, nymphs, hermits,

saints (St Jerome in the Wilderness, St Bernadette at Lourdes), for minor and for major deities.

Cold statements of the nature, origin, formation of caverns conclude only that a cave is a cave; whereas caves have enshrined the superintendent Spirit of Les Trois Frères and the Red Mare of Labastide, and Zeus and the offspring of Zeus, and Christ, and the calm, faintly smiling Buddhas of India and China. Weren't the Dead Sea Scrolls found in caves? Wasn't the first of the world's printed books, Buddha's discourse of the Diamond Sutra, found in the rock temple of the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas? Wasn't the infant Zeus hidden from the jaws of his father in a cave in Mt Aegaeon? Impregnated by Zeus, didn't Europa give birth to Minos in the Dictaeon Cave? And if the Gospels say that Christ was born in a house or a stable, soon enough wasn't that house or that stable transmuted into a cave — into a shining cave, in the desert?

*And Mary said unto him: Take me down from the ass, for that which is within me presseth me, to come forth. And he took her down from the ass and said unto her: Whither shall I take thee to hide thy shame? for the place is desert.*

*And he found a cave there and brought her into it, and set his sons by her: and he went forth and sought for a midwife of the Hebrews in the country of Bethlehem.*

And he found a midwife, declares this *Book of James*, or *Protevangelium*, and the midwife went with him:

*And they stood in the place of the cave: and behold a bright cloud overshadowing the cave. And the midwife said: My soul is magnified this day, because mine eyes have seen marvellous things: for salvation is born unto Israel. And immediately the cloud withdrew itself out of the cave, and a great light appeared in the cave so that our eyes could not endure it. And little by little that light withdrew itself until the young child appeared: and it went and took the breast of its mother Mary.*

And at Lourdes, by this river Gave, by the limestone, by the shallow cave of Massabielle, Bernadette Soubirous, illiterate, simple-minded, subnormal, anaemic, thin, consumptive, reaching puberty, the child of a poor miller, on February 11, 1858, felt a roaring in her ears and a great gust sweeping through her, and she looked up and



no longer saw the trees (which had not been stirred at all by the gust, to her surprise), but instead a dazzling whiteness, 'a kind of bright light which appeared to her to settle itself against the rock, in a narrow lofty slit above the cave'.

A second time, and out of the bright light appeared a lady, and smiled; a third visit, and the lady spoke; and as Bernadette paid visit after visit, the white lady of the rock became more and more exactly a Virgin of the picture-books, blue-eyed, fair-haired, with golden roses flowering on her white feet. She asked Bernadette to pray for sinners, to tell the priests to build a chapel there, to drink and wash herself at a spring which forthwith appeared in the cave; and on the fifteenth appearance of eighteen appearances she announced to Bernadette, not 'I am the Blessed Virgin', but (the Pope had pronounced the dogma of the spotless conception of the Virgin, free of all stain of original sin four years before in 1854) 'I am the Immaculate Conception'.

*Vierge lumineuse* — self-luminous.

Art is light. Vision is light. In the cave you are withdrawn from daylight to this other light, in the cave of Chartres to light, inside the blackness, of the supernal poppies and cornflowers, in the cave of the baroque church to concretions of glittering pigmentation and gold, in the cave of Gargas to concretions of glittering natural mineral pigmentation and to the glow of the red hands. Australians, candidates for the degree of medicine man, have received power in the sacramental shape of the rock crystal and pearly shells (rock crystal has been found in the occupation levels of French palaeolithic caves; and a quartz crystal in the occupation levels of our own Cave of the Red Lady of Paviland). And the Arunta had a cave near Alice Springs in which the spirits of their ancestors, the source and guardians of power and continuity, lived in a perpetual sunshine.

*Spécialité, Vierges lumineuses.* It is a question of qualities.

You approach the gardens, you try to enter. An official at the gateway points to your perhaps protestant head (if you are a woman), which is not decent. *PÉLERINS, Dans le Domaine de Notre-Dame*, says a notice sternly (were there such notices at the limestone approaches to Delphi, the Oracle of Apollo, and the Castalian Spring? Not yet):

*Ayez une tenue décente.*

(Most of Lourdes, you have perhaps decided by this time with increasing dismay and distaste, wears a guise which is not decent at all):

*Les Dames: en robe et tête couverte.*

*Les Messieurs: jambes et bras couverts.*

*Le tenue de sport n'est pas une tenue de Pèlerinage.*

*Ne fumez pas.*

*Recueillez-vous*

*Silences rigoureux dans les églises,  
devant la Grotte, et les Piscines*

Conviction hardens that you see a monstrous, indeed a cruel imposture no better for being willingly self-inflicted, while self-evidently hopeless cripples are wheeled in hope in the shabby brown bath-chairs, while nurses walk by in white from a hospital conforming to necessity and conforming more to good sense, in which they tend the bad cases on pilgrimage from all over Europe, while a priest in big black boots raises his Leica before a group of parishioners, the incurables of the parish all collected and concentrated symmetrically — he waves, signals, to make the symmetry more perfect — in the front row.

Follow a bath-chair past the tall Calvary of the Bretons down the Esplanade, and past the very tall statue of the Virgin. It is pulled slowly over these levels by the river, over the asphalt, over the paving-stones, it is pulled, with its burden, around the Church of the Rosary, and at last it slows down; there, at last, as an anti-climax almost, yet a welcome one, a simple one, below the architectural icing-sugar and after the gaudiness — is the cave, *Grotte miraculeuse*, Bernadette's Grotte de Massabielle; there, in the smoky niche in which she saw the dazzlement of whiteness, is a white-and-blue confectionery Virgin; and there are the natural familiar volutes of limestone, darkened by the candle smoke.

Fat candles, thin candles, long candles, short ones, cheap ones and expensive ones (a good fat, but not super fat candle costs a thousand francs) stand as white as lilies, each with a yellow stigma of flame. The smoke of all these candles, constantly renewed, rises, hangs about, blackens the rocks and the crutches pendent from a rocky lintel. Real lilies, Madonna Lilies, stand there as well, white and waxy, odoriferous, in a competition of scents, in vases by the altar.



*Ave Maria, Ave Maria.* . . . A young cripple, whose dry legs are covered with a rug marked ITALIA, and an old cripple twisted in all directions, are pulled towards the cave by two elderly drab fellow-countrywomen who tell their rosaries, glance towards the Virgin, shuffle forward in black slippers. *Mary, Mother of God.* . . . The cripple in all directions, with grey in her black hair drawn tight over her skull, directs to the cave a face of pathetic, indeed of a silly or simple pious expectation — pathetic because her expression says, in spite of herself, 'pity me, because, after all, after all, nothing is going to happen'. The young cripple has a young face, open and rapt, not expectant; to the smoky holes in the rock she opens her hands, palms outward and a little upward, in a gesture of *give me what you will*, which is too poignant to watch. Crutch cripples, Bruegel in modern dress, make their own way between the benches. Voices behind one's back pass, intoning 'Mary, Mother of God' unexpectedly in American English — from two nuns. A pilgrim, brown-leather-faced, black-haired, black-bearded, in a cloak as brown as his face, kneels and fingers bead upon bead in front of the cave and the candles. An American father and mother and two children in red jeans, each clutching a new candle, kneel in the forefront; an attendant wheels a barrow, a truck rather, past the candle-stands, collecting stumps and flows of wax, and snuffing candles which are down to the last half-centimetre. The Italian hags to the right have stopped their Ave Marias, and contrive to get their young charge and their old silly of a charge on to crutches; both amble awkwardly, with enormous, unfamiliar effort of locomotion, under the Virgin's statue, and to the rock which pilgrim after pilgrim kisses, and smooths tenderly and tenderly again with hand or cheek.

The smoke has blackened and killed the ivy hanging below the Virgin, there is a border between blackened rock and rock with living vegetation. Cripples shuffle in, round the island of candles and lilies, and back again, into bath-chairs. There is a mixed smell, stronger now on the air, of lilies and wax and snuffing. And the Italian hags draw off their couple, who also have circumnavigated the island, intoning again; the rug with ITALIA in green arranged once more to hide the limbs which are not limbs. One of them draws the bath-chair and her cripple in a new way: she drops to her knees, she walks on her knees, pulling the chair like that, with how much extra, miracle-eliciting, blackmailing piety, for ten yards

across the stone paving. At the taps which draw off water from a tank slowly filled behind the scenes by the trickle of the fountain of miracles, others, who are not at all observing *un silence rigoureux*, chatter and chatter in French and Italian and fill their coloured polythene bottles and coloured aluminium flasks.

This is Lourdes of every day, not Lourdes of special days — of special pilgrimages *en masse*. The young mediaeval black-beard in a brown skin and a brown robe continues to lift his devout, black animal's eyes to the shallow niche, looking as dusty as if he had walked across half the Europe of Chaucer or Dante or Erasmus.

In the town distaste floods back.

Was the actual *Grotte miraculeuse* palaeolithic, Magdalenian, perhaps, under the candles and the shuffling feet? I do not know. I had meant to climb the Mont du Calvaire, immediately above the Église de Rosaire and the Basilica and the Grotte and the fountain and the taps, for there, actually, Palaeolithic Man did leave behind traces of himself and his different credo, engravings upon slabs and pebbles of bison and reindeer, rhinoceros, and horses. There, at the back of the Mont du Calvaire, two hundred and fifty yards from the lilies and the wax and the pilgrims and petitioners, in 1860, undisturbed by the clamours under the rock, the squabbings and fervours pro and con, the visions of feeble-minded Bernadette, a friend of Édouard Lartet's was making some of the very first excavations on an Upper Palaeolithic site. The cave is called the Grotte des Espelugues.

No. To Lourdes come a million pilgrims in a year. Then Luther? Luther or Calvin? The hunting of French Protestants into caves and the wilderness? Earlier still, the Cathars or Albigensians of Ariège and the South who stood for a purity of worship and priesthood seven centuries ago, and were hunted, murdered, burned, starved to death in walled-up caves, and extirpated?

It is not easy in religion to maintain that dignity suppositiously 'of man', which in fact is always the dignity of a few men, and no others.

Erasmus at Walsingham. There is the cottage, the Sancta Casa from Nazareth which miraculously appeared at Walsingham in the winter season when Norfolk was covered with snow. It is centuries old, its walls are new, its beams are new, and its thatch is new; and how could the sexton prove its age if it wasn't for an old bear's skin



fixed to the rafters? Inside this Sancta Casa flows the spring, which here, too, broke out of the ground at the command of the most holy Virgin, 'wonderfully cold and efficacious in curing pains of the head and stomach'.

(Menedemus: If cold water can cure the pains of the head and stomach, very soon oil will extinguish fire.

Ogygius: You are told a miracle, my good fellow: for what miracle would there be if cold water merely satisfied thirst?)

Walsingham vanished:

*Levell, levell with the ground  
The Towres doe lye  
Which with their golden glitt'ring tops  
Pierced oute to the skye*

— ran a lament for Walsingham. And Lourdes must not be too sure of itself.

Qualities. All a matter of qualities.

I myself would prefer another cave of the Virgin. Deep in the Gouffre d'Esparros, in a pot-hole in the commune of Esparros two miles from Labastide, is the altar of Notre-Dame des Gouffres, the Virgin of the Pot-holes, the Virgin of the Cavers.

Give me, even then, the Red Horse; since between Lourdes and the other caves the state of things is reversed. At Lourdes, buildings, reason, order, organization surround a disorder of emotion, expressed in the symbol of a sugary statue, in a niche grubby with smoke. In Labastide, within the surrounding grubby disorder of rock and cave and nature they set with ordered emotion (how many thousands of years ago?) the clearest and most reasoned symbol they knew how to contrive.

## XIV

### The Sacred Mountain

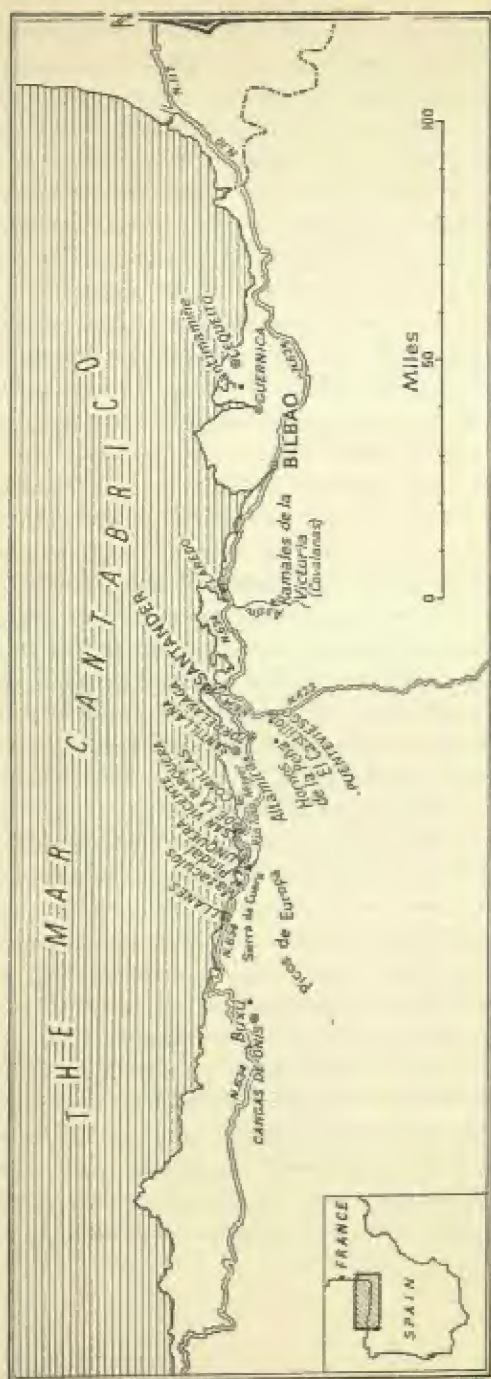
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THE HEIGHT OF THE Somport — the *Summa Porta*, the highest gate — between France and Spain, surrounded by anchovy and ochre mountains, peaked with snow under the floating snow of clouds in a cobalt sky, is a good place for disinfection and for ridding oneself of Lourdes; though orange peel is not uncommon among the alpenrosen and the egg-yolk of the rock-roses, the gentians and the white saxifrage. It is one of the noblest of passes between country and country, up and up through beechwoods, down through bare rocks; but it is not the most sensible or the shortest route to the first notice pointing *A las cavernas prehistoricas*. The Abbé Breuil and Emile Carthailac, on their journey to an at last vindicated and accepted Altamira in 1902, went the sensible way — which is round the Pyrenees and not over them, to Biarritz and down the Côte Basque and over the nervous border into the Middle Ages.

*A las cavernas prehistoricas* — I saw the notice in the light of a nearly full moon; and there, above a palm tree, above a wall, a house, a road, a valley, was the great hump of a hill, the Peña de Nuestra Señora del Castillo, a great black sphinx without a head, but with a luminous outline from the full moon; which contained my first four Spanish caves — not Altamira, but El Castillo, and La Pasiéga, and Las Monedas, and Las Chimeneas. (Plate facing page 161.)

The situation is above Puenteviego in the province of Santander, deep — exceedingly deep — in an everlasting valley towards the Atlantic, or rather the Mar Cantabrico. I had reached into its depth late after a drive of more arresting and surprising change than I had ever known within fifty or sixty miles. France had long ago ended on the Summa Porta with a squat fat column, declaring that this was the Route Imperiale No. 134, begun on July 22, 1808, continued (under a second Emperor) on July 14, 1861, finished — but there was no date, the inscription and France breaking off together. Spain had long ago begun with a closed zone of military suspicion and with its dry, eroded, coloured African face. Far on across these African





6. The Cantabrian Coast

features, under a sky without clouds, I had spent most of the morning and the afternoon skirting the edge of the great plateau, brown, yellow, dark green, which stretches to Burgos and beyond Burgos towards Salamanca and Madrid. I had spent it drinking the air of Spain, which is more astonishing at first than the air of childhood in the morning in April, before breakfast. The sun beat down. There was pure heat above, around, and ahead; but no stuffiness.

In Spain, distrust all roads yellow on the map. I dared a short cut across country in the direction — so the signpost said — of Santander, back at an angle towards the tawny African side of the mountains. First it was yellow on the map, then white, and how white, how worn, tarless, corroded, how much a surface of twenty miles an hour, then ten, then five, and a crawl, and dust, and gorges and climbs and descents and climbs.

But it was a geographical instruction — this improper and extravagant and wearying way to the caves — a mixed *via dolorosa*, of extravagance, anxiety, and exhilaration; since it taught me how much the Cantabrian mountains continued the Pyrenees, how much their slopes and the land between them and the Atlantic belong, with a maritime difference, to the region of Labastide and Mas d'Azil, Les Trois Frères and Niaux, and not at all to Spain's African tawnniness.

Suddenly the world was transformed. Great Spanish distances, heated distances on a mighty upland on either side of the road, changed — to Dartmoor, boulders, heather, cotton-grass, mist. I left sun, and entered cloud, which announced that the Atlantic was ahead and infinitely underneath. Down by the steepnesses and the reiterated plunge of a valley road, between stones painted white as a warning in the frequent mist of the curves and the sides of the road, down and down into clamminess; yet to a tidier neighbourhood, like a Dartmoor valley, a Lakeland valley, at times a Derbyshire Dale, with plants and trees and greenness detected faintly through the mist, and then more clearly detected beneath the clouds; a neighbourhood where at first only the endless apothegms from the Caudillo's quotation book painted in blue on the white of the houses reminded one of Spain. This, too, was the country of the red deer of the Spanish caves — the mildish country, through ups and downs and an earlier final amelioration of climate, of the Upper Palaeolithic.



Then, at last, Puenteviego, the deep green river, the barrack-buildings, hollow and shabby, of a spa hundreds of feet below *las cavernas prehistoricas* in the hill which no book celebrates as it should be celebrated, and which before long had its edge of moonlight, of such admirable and such tender radiance.

The French who care at all for the arts, are not habituated altogether to the existence of art outside the borders of France. Italy must be allowed. But how correct that Italy should have next to no palaeolithic art (so far engravings — poor ones, too — are known in a cavern near Otranto in the heel of Italy; and a few more in a cave on Levanzo, one of the Egadi Islands) as well as next to no contemporary art! And how correct that the first artists of the stock of *Homo sapiens* should belong almost to the School of Paris — Paris being then at Montignac-sur-Vézère or Rouffignac or in the valley of the Beune — which would be true, if it were not for these other artists of the Cantabrian Mountains and the north of Spain (not to mention the artists of the cave-shelters in the east of Spain). At any rate, the discovery of Lascaux redressed an uneasy balance; and I have still to read a French publication which is quite honest about the clarity, the sympathy, and the excellence of the best of the cave paintings in Spain; which says what should be said in praise of the animals of Santimamiñe, for example, or Covalanas, or the animals which live so unconcernedly inside this hollowed-out hill of limestone above Puenteviego, so quietly in its coolness.

No preliminary glimpses, no hints the night before, and for that matter, as I say, nothing in the books prepared me for all the facts of this hill or peak, and for the largest fact of all — that it is a Sacred Hill of prehistoric man, unique in the world, as its guardian naïvely and quite truly proclaims to the explorer; giving an experience as possessive, as voluminous, as stimulating and as durable as anyone can have in pursuit of the art of the caves. I climbed the hill — better call it a peak, since it rises in a splendid regular isolation above the valley; from most points of view not a sphinx sideways on, but a cone almost too perfect — I climbed this peak or cone expecting the stencilled hands, the painted bison, the strange extra large and numerous red tectiforms and the engravings of El Castillo — 'The Castle', the first great cave discovered more than fifty years ago; expecting also (though not

realizing in advance how bold and how fresh they would be) the paintings of La Pasiëga, a cave further round, opening off the same high path which encircles the peak. Everything else came as a bonus of delight, Las Monedas, Las Chimeneas, the flowers, the sense of being in one of the High Places of this world, the whole character indeed of this Sacred Hill, so good a perch for deity or hawk or huntsman.

On either side of the path which goes up to the encircling path there flowed the rock-gardener's *Lithospermum diffusum*; the wild form, not the gardener's Heavenly Blue, though blue and heavenly enough. It is the signature flower, the special emblem, of the Cantabrian Mountains and Cantabrian caves. Other flowers in a natural paradise of early summer recalled the south-west of England, Cornwall, Devonshire — Red Valerian, for one, Cornish Balm, for another.

High up, El Castillo, as I say, comes first; after this climb above the spa and the road to Madrid and the railway and the green river Paz; it comes first, and it may come last, if you fail to show enough interest to the guide and guardian, who is in love intelligently, enthusiastically, and reasonably with his caverns and his peak. It is a cave of good cavernous qualities, lofty, on several levels, lighted a little faintly, in the manner (altogether more haunting) of all the principal Spanish caves, by weak bulbs or weak current, leaving much shadow and mystery (in Spain the fixed lights always need supplementing by torches and carbide lamps).

The Spaniards care discreetly for the look of their painted caves, and for first impressions as you come near the entrance. Wild figs ornament an arch of rock outside El Castillo, overhanging a pit or lobby sloping backwards into the hill. Steps rise to a doorway, and on a stone platform in front of the steps the custodian has a small hut of stones and red tiles. The cave was discovered in 1903, after the deferred triumph of Altamira had stimulated cave exploration in the neighbouring limestone. This lobby to El Castillo was choked with more than fifty feet of the debris of occupation as neatly stratified as a diagram. Cutting down from the surface to the rock, here was the Old Stone Age displayed, Magdalenian down to Solutrean, Gravettian, Aurignacian; down still further in the pit of time to Mousterian and Acheulian. Here were tools and weapons and left-overs — bones of animals hunted, killed, and eaten through many



thousands of year. Climates and cultures alike could be interpreted through phases that had been damp, cold, very cold, and a good deal less extreme. Remains of red deer abounded, except during cold Gravettian years when remains of the horse supplanted them; afterwards the red deer (which mean forest) came back into the record in the thick Magdalenian layers. Above all the Cantabrian artists and magicians depicted these red deer, both hinds and stags, as well as bison and wild horses. Oxen, too, and ibex they were concerned with, and an occasional wild boar, another creature of the woods; but not reindeer, which came so far south only in small numbers in the coldest times of Gravettians, Solutreans, and Early Magdalenians.

Life in the front porch, ritual art at the back; inside El Castillo, as you move from level to level, from passage into passage, you encounter engravings, drawings, hands stencilled with red ochre (nearly all left hands, again, as though the imprinter had used his right hand to hold a blow-pipe to his mouth). Here are Aurignacian, Gravettian, Magdalenian images, here are stags and hinds, horses, ibex, ox, and huge Magdalenian bison, sometimes painted on to the rock over the ancient Aurignacian hands. One bison is standing, one has its forelegs and hind legs bent, its head down, its horns out (or horn, since only one is painted) in the crouched attitude of the famous bison of Altamira. Yet these few bison are no longer so distinguishable as one may hope and expect.

This cave in the Sacred Hill, known to the ancient men through the long palaeolithic time, is the grand tabernacle, above all, of signs and trails and tectiforms; of long rectangles or curving box-shapes of red ochre, with ladder-like edges and internal subdivisions, of small enclosing shapes, of blobs of ochre marching in long lines this way and that across the waviness of the rock, as in Marsoulas or Les Trois Frères. These blobs of El Castillo are often in the company of tectiforms, sometimes parallel, sometimes leading to them, as if the association were deliberate and contemporaneous, as if, at times in single rows, at times in double, at times in a row of five, they represented the track of animals, indeed a winding of animals to traps or to inner sanctities and recesses of the cave — or to both. The Abbé Breuil likes to see in tectiforms 'fixed residences' for the souls of ancestors, who may well have lived in the caves in France and Spain as they live in the caverns of Australia. Certainly in El Castillo you have to crouch, and turn sideways, and squeeze, to

observe some of the tectiforms. Others in this cave, some of the smaller enclosing shapes, could well stand for those tread-traps I mentioned earlier on, which from Bronze Age to modern times were set for trapping red deer in the woodland regions of northern Europe.

As for the Aurignacian hands glowing in El Castillo, here again they do not proffer an exact corresponding hand-shape. I interrupted writing this chapter to go for the afternoon into Oxford, and down the Turl and down a lane by the Bodleian Library I noticed that a boy had been printing his two hands in white on the rough wall, then on a wooden shutter, then across the red of a letter-box. His hand-prints or positives were more intimately and accurately human, very different from the negative effect of blowing a colour-wash around fingers and thumb.

It was the custodian's small son who guided me in El Castillo from the first hands and the first bison to the last and deepest of the coloured drawings in the cave, which is an Aurignacian elephant, simply and a little roughly and flatly delineated in red, down a long passage spotted on the one side with a red trail. It was that elephant (not mammoth) I had met before, in Cougnac — the Wood Elephant, surviving longer down here also, before the damp and leafy forest which these elephants required had given way to the increasing cold of the Ice Age. Nearby he led me to the living interest of a stalagmite column up and down the damp surface of which small beetles (as they appeared to be) were on the run. The boy jumped and leapt through the cave like an ibex, but when we reached the hut outside he had no inclination to reveal La Pasiega to a visitor whose duty was to vanish back into his own world like a bat into dusk or a fish into the stream. Spanish guides, though, are less impatient, less harassed, less automatic — and less in search of money — than the French ones; and since I showed more concern to stay where I was than to vanish, he lifted his eyebrows, unhooked keys from the wall, pointed to copies of a monograph about Las Monedas, picked up a carbide lamp, turned on the water, and lit the flame; in a drizzle, under low English skies, we now walked farther along the level terrace of air.

An hour later I came out into the drizzle again, not from Las Monedas, but from La Pasiega, leaving its crowded animal life with clothes and feet unsoiled, unbrowned for once, despite all the straits



I had pushed through and peered into. La Pasiega, so lucid and so clean, no longer quite agrees with the description of it given by the Abbé Breuil. He copied there in 1911, soon after the first exploration of the cave, but the entry available to him meant negotiating a hole across the floor before all of the colour drawings and engravings could be reached. Since then, another entry has been unblocked; and now, in effect, there are two caves, each with its own door, on either side of the hole, each door opening a way to particular treasures. But still 'La Pasiega' — 'The Passage' — describes this divided art gallery well enough at either end; a passage water-washed, with surfaces that seem as fresh and crisp, and must have been as inviting as a new ground of lime plaster ready for frescoes on a medieval wall, or as a new sheet of Whatman. The air inside is damp, it is true, in the way of these northern Spanish caves; but this external damp does little harm and seems here as elsewhere to make the pigmented lines shine all the more brilliantly from the rock.

Accounts I have read of La Pasiega are altogether minimizing. Who has described, as it deserves, the small chapel reached from the further of the two doors where in a pleat of limestone a pair of hinds — head and shoulders in red line — face one another, the hind on the left snuffing the air, the hind on the right with its head lowered; two figurations, two ritual acts of admiration alone on bare untarnished rock, perfectly preserved? *Who paints a figure, if he cannot be it, cannot draw it.* The artist was these two hinds, one after the other as he drew, as if deer were his totems, as if he lived with deer 'in one social and ceremonial whole'. Next to them, large, later (these two hinds are Gravettian), less noble in drawing, a red-and-black Magdalenian horse stands across the rock, again distinct and finely preserved; also a horse outlined in black, firm and full; and on the opposite wall a bison of fluent curly black line, its tail aloft, shows, like the bison of Marsoulas, that an artist could now and again solve the problems of representing this lumpiest of cave-creatures.

How, though, am I to convey the purity of these drawings, the originality of their condition, indeed the purity of the whole chapel in which you find them? I have felt a parallel only at Cougnac — for purity (at Cougnac the drawings have no such merit); or at Covalanas or Santimamiñe. And yet — look again — the far wall of this chapel of purity is new, is concrete, carefully, discreetly toned, firmly

blocking yet another entrance into La Pasiëga which was shut only by accumulations of earth, and might have endangered these few masterpieces of awe and delight.

Outside, reversing our steps along the cincture of the mountain path towards the second door into La Pasiëga, I passed the crude earth heaped up against the concrete on the outside, already colonized with black bryony.

In at the other door; and again you come to colour drawings in purity, drawings as fresh and young-seeming as in any of the caverns of France or Spain; some of them primitive and very simple — Aurignacian animals; some, on the washed walls, as tender as could be — especially another hind, in red, with an exquisitely pleasurable lineament of back and belly, an exquisite outgrowing of neck and joining of neck to body; and, again, in a cleft only to be entered sideways, bold tectiforms, traps or soul-houses, or whatever they may be.

For a long while El Castillo and La Pasiëga were the only caves of the peak known and explored. The excavations in the mouth of El Castillo no less than the paintings, drawings, engravings, and designs in the cave itself, proved the ancient importance of the peak. That there were other caves was likely, that they might contain drawings and paintings was at least possible. First El Castillo was put in order and lighted, the path was made upwards from Puente-viesgo to El Castillo and La Pasiëga (all this in 1950), and searchings, probings, delvings began. Two caves were quickly unsealed, La Flecha and El Lago, one long and complex, next to El Castillo, the other ending in a lake more than thirty yards long. But no pictures. In 1952 a forester began clearing off the brambles and scrub at a steep point on the south-west of the peak round the corner and out of sight of Puente-viesgo, about a hundred yards from La Pasiëga on about the same level. He was going to plant eucalyptus trees, which now cover many of the hills which raised a barren surface around Santander and along the coast. Hereabouts, when he was a boy tending sheep, he remembered entering a cave which no one else knew; he now set fire to the brambles and scrub, and there it was: there was the lost cave, there was a small hole among the rocks, there indeed was Las Monedas, the Cave of the Coins, a name it was soon given because far inside, in a vertical chimney, the explorers



found a number of coins of the fifteenth century. They also found drawings in black line — in a gallery not so very far from the entrance.

So to Las Monedas, to a cavern of holes and galleries, ascents and descents, cascades, pillars, curtains, of a natural intricacy; a variety, a fantasy, a pantomime entirely Spanish and baroque. Here on the rock are horses, ibex, stags, perhaps a reindeer, stretching its head forward and down, with antler curving backwards, in a pose reminding me of one of the two celebrated reindeer in red of Font-de-Gaume, only this reindeer, so much less 'finished', is also so much more compassionately drawn. Las Monedas was haunted by cave bears as well as by man. A flint spearhead was found among the bones of a cave bear; and in the painted gallery is the most revealing of all drawings of such a bear, three feet long from a merely indicated tail to its soft nose.

It seemed enough. We walked back, we trod air again on the path back towards El Castillo, which had been the chief dwelling place of the Aurignacians, Gravettians, Solutreans, Magdalenians of the peak. A creaking came up from below. I looked down through the air on to insect oxen pulling a less than matchbox-sized load of hay, on to the tiny shape of a girl stretched on top of the load.

'Chimeneas,' said the guide, and stopped and rattled at a door in the limestone, and found it locked, and felt in a nook for the key, as one might feel in the corner of a porch or under the mat or behind the diocesan notices for a church key, shook his head, laid down the still burning carbide lamp, and hurried off to his hut by El Castillo, coming back with the key into this still more recently found cave. It has scarcely been described yet, its drawings, I think, are still not photographed, or published.

'Las Chimeneas' is simply the chimneys — by that happy and useful parallelism of so much Spanish and English; and down this cavern goes, as if down one chimney, then another, step by step. How different the caves are in this one peak — El Castillo vaulted and decidedly cavernous, and rather muddy, La Pasiega narrow, smooth, clean-walled, Las Monedas so many-chambered, so spreading, and now Las Chimeneas dropping its perpendicular shafts, then again opening into clean halls, clean galleries, squeezes, and pleats!

At the bottom of the chimneys, there is a slit, smooth-edged in the floor, partly blocked with calcite, or narrowed with calcite, too

much so to allow the passage of a man. Kneel beside this slit, shine your carbide lamp through, and there you see bones on the floor of an under-chamber, a cellar, an oubliette precisely, some with their bony outlines a little blurred but all of them white and sparkling with the crystals of the calcite which have entered them; some less calcified, but all *fixed*, cemented by calcite, to the floor — the bones of a cave bear transformed into a glittering fossilized heap.

Las Chimeneas has not a great many drawings, I admit, but what a frame, what a mount, what a gallery, what a chapel for the few it has, on a ground clear as gesso! First, on a great leaf of rock there are more tectiforms in black, as strong as if they had been scrawled there on the morning of one's visit, three of them, three rectangles suggesting fall-traps — in no inaccessible, awkward niche, this time. Squeeze, though, behind this hanging leaf or blade of rock, and there you meet two isolated economical heads in black outline, one of a stag and one of a horse. Squeeze again into a narrow, rather low, yet uncontaminated passage: a bold stag confronts you, he is black again in his lineaments, resolutely so, his tail is brisk, his legs, as so frequently, extend enough only to suggest the whole of him; filled from within, his body pushes against the line and seems to swell out from the plane surface; his antlers are in 'twisted perspective', both of them visible in the side view. Crane your head carefully around a vertical slice of limestone: a second stag comes into view, a third, a fourth, a fifth, none superimposed, all big, all in black line, most of them (with this twisted perspective of antlers) admirable because so much is created with indications which are so sparse and simple.

Again these are drawings of such surprising purity, so uncontaminated by their convention, or by the physical circumstances of the cave, at once so old and so new, and so effortlessly superior to any tracing or any photograph. In its depth also Las Chimeneas can display a number of 'macaroni' animals, Early Aurignacian, scrawled by the fingers through roof clay to an underlying whiteness. Engraving goes a stage further when these clay meanders are made not with the fingers but with an extension; with some tool, that is to say, like a comb with a few fixed teeth or a fork with a few fixed prongs — perhaps with the paw and claws of an animal.

Consider this fourth cave of art and ritual in a single small mountain. Consider four caves all near to each other, along this cincture of a path, at the same height. Nowhere do palaeolithic existence,



palaeolithic belief, palaeolithic art appear more concentrated and less corrupted; in few caves are red drawings or black drawings as well preserved, as well spaced, or of higher quality on smoother walls.

What more will yet be found inside this Sacred Hill? Yellow dribbles or red-ochraceous dribbles of earth spilling down the flanks of Peña de Nuestra Señora del Castillo mark new explorations in progress.

## Altamira

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THE SIGN OF A crouched or galloping bison points to Altamira off the main road, twelve miles or so, by Torrelavega, from the Sacred Hill, and only a few minutes from Santillana del Mar, which is an expertly picturesque little city put back into the self-consciousness of repair. Altamira, also repaired and propped, is far less self-knowing. It calls out in no loud or bullying voice, the sign in a bare landscape indicating no more than 'Visit me by all means, if you feel like it'.

The weather alone was discourteous. Clouds off the Mar Cantabrico were low but not in a hurry, the light was poor; nothing but a yellow kilometre stone, which made a table for lunch, and the red tiles of a few farmhouses and the plane trees along the road, each with a band of whitewash, contradicted a feeling of school holidays in Cornwall, also in the rain: a wet day for a cream tea inland, the bracken heavy with water drops. Only these walls were not granite, but limestone. The hills were low, suggesting by a fang here and there the stone so immediately under the ridges or knuckles of grass. A gypsy walked with her child towards Santillana, a nun walked very fatly below an umbrella, a small fossil sea-urchin looked out from a flat stone on the wall; and but for a magpie cackling under the grey pressure of the clouds, it was very quiet, very gentle, very ordinary, for one of the celebrated places of the world.

A track climbed a quiet way up to a ridge among fields, eucalyptus trees stood caressingly around a car-park, a golden oriole fluted among the leafage once more, hens pecked across the path; and the black rectangle of a doorway appeared under two sloping strata of limestone, which bushes and a tree or two made inconspicuous. When Breuil and Carthailac penetrated here (in the rain) in the autumn of 1902, the scene was less neat and humanized. They dived underground through a hole scarcely visible in the scrub, there was no road, no path, the precise spot had been drained of any human aura late in the Magdalenian period, when rock had tumbled and had



shut the cave and stabled the bison for a long, long obscurity. Where Breuil lay on sacks stuffed with straw and fern and gazed up at the roof and copied as best he could by the light of candles, you now lie back dryly and comfortably and gaze at bison, horse, wild boar, with the aid of large round lamps, like searchlights. Yet this Hall of the Bison is scrubby as a pin-table saloon on a wet day in the Edgware Road; and as a whole Altamira is a poor soiled cave, its rock breathed upon, its floor trodden now for more than half a century; a tired cave — tired of hundreds of thousands of visitors, a cave which threatened to come to bits and is now shored by walls and divisions of concrete. A much-visited temple of a new Mithras on the abandoned track and platforms of a London tube-station, in a period without art or organization, after an atomic disaster to our world, would appear much as Altamira.

Altamira was an old shrine. It contains Aurignacian meanders, hand-prints and stencils, ancient monochromes in black line, and sprightly, bouncing, pale red Gravettian horses. The painting space was well covered when large bulges and bosses on a low roof suggested a refurbishing of that part of the cave with bison — a medley of bisons to be modelled in several colours, red, black, yellow, brown, violet; standing, curled, crouching; a medley again of that species whose thick body provided such prodigal quantities of meat, yet offered so little to the artist inside the medicine-man. I remembered here, not for the first time, another herd of bison, corralled in a meadow at San Francisco, between Golden Gate Park and the Pacific; they grazed peacefully, wicked sunken heads to the grass, and their mudstreaked hindquarters showing up in the sun, rubbed and lean and muscular; I disliked their weight, their bulk, their clumsiness, their solidity, their contour, their blend of shagginess and nakedness; and if my casual grasp of these bison was nothing to the grasp of these artists or that one artist (one artist it could well have been) who designed these creatures in Altamira, I found myself wishing now that the developed skill of the polychromes could have been expended upon other species of the hunt, in the circumstances of a different cave.

Less than a minute underground takes you into the mean and dirty natural architecture of the Hall of the Bison. They are tyrants, these bison: they insist upon attention, they (and the searchlights directed onto them) prevent the eyes wandering to other details,

other images, and they have won admiration which, to a modern eye, is not deserved altogether.

First of all, though, no other large Magdalenian polychromes (remember that Lascaux is not Magdalenian) are still so distinct, and still retain so much of their drawing and modelling and royalty of colour (which is especially strong in its effect on a wet day); and though it is often alleged that they were set all anyhow across the roof, the twenty or more animals are composed, in a rough way, beyond any doubt at all. I would guess not only that one artist could have painted all or nearly all of these polychromes, but that one artist did paint them, across the older faded or scrubbed paintings on the roof.

I think he began with the four curled crouching bison painted around the bulges and bosses in the rock. They are four cows. Three raise their tails receptively. The fourth half raises or lowers her tail and turns a head back with that mild countenance which helps to distinguish all these cows from the imperial, impassive bulls. The crouching receptive cows form a group across the ceiling of the hall; and on rock which is more or less flat, the Master added to the group two more rather gentle females, one of which is a young receptive cow raising both her head and her tail (the 'bellowing bison', she is usually called).

Left and right stand the bulls, filled out by a different sentiment altogether: they are not passive, they are masculine, they are bullish, massively and actively *potential*, for all their immobility. The bulls on the left face outwards to the left, the bulls on the right face outwards to the right; and on each flank of this herd of the creatures of fertility a wild boar drives inward, as much in movement as the bison are still.

Far from puny, these bison, five or six feet long from horns to tail. And with what intricacy each one is designed inside itself; and with how much definition, how much plasticity and how much experience the colours are combined and contrasted and applied! A careful look shows how the bison are partly engraved. There are engraved indications of the head and the tail, the back and the belly or hoof, as if the painter just needed that much to fix the girth while his hand brought the bull bison or cow bison into clearer being, stroke by stroke, with boundaries of black, and colour modelling of lights and darks, and telling items of detail.



Engraving in the rock is a laborious, but a technically simple, kind of draughtsmanship; and in palaeolithic art engraved animals came before the painted ones. Engraving continued apparently on its own. But when painting developed, the painter often engraved his indications first and then added the colour (sometimes the paint has gone and the engraved indications remain). The Master of the Bison of Altamira may have found such engraved indications useful, but one can hardly think he needed them any more. He may have obeyed a tradition, all the same, an uncriticized, uncontradicted habit; he may, I think, have felt that only the old tradition of *cutting* the animal into the rock gave it that durable, genuine being which the ritual required.

Still the Master is not above criticism or reproach. It is true these bison keep an energy, it is true the Master does fight ingeniously against the lumpish difficulty of the species; which he still *knows* as living game, directly, across the Cantabrian hills and valleys. Yet he elaborates them too much, and expends on them an already weakening virtuosity; and what is too ripe threatens to begin to rot.

Fifty years ago it was these Magdalenian bison of Altamira which stunned the world into an acceptance of cave art; a ripeness perhaps appealing to a more decided over-ripeness. Requisites for art were then various. Men were 'finishers', or else men worked for the single 'impression'. In the interests of either party's estimation of natural truth some of them added and elaborated facts, others subordinated facts, or reduced their number.

'In my opinion', Mr Edward Burne-Jones had affirmed in 1878, in *Whistler v. Ruskin* (and his opinion would have served widely in 1902 or 1910), 'complete finish ought to be the object of all artists.'

Does Mr Whistler's *Nocturne*, asked counsel, 'show the finish of a complete work of Art?'

'Not in any sense whatever,' said Mr Burne-Jones. 'It shows no finish — it is simply a sketch.'

Students, wrote an English critic in 1899, defending Velasquez and impressionism and attacking the finishers, should not be accustomed to *miss the broader sweep of a line for the sake of tight detailed modelling and the exaggerated indenting of small bays in an outline*.

So either party's adherents could welcome, if they cared to

acknowledge them at all, these images of the Master of the Bison of Altamira.

*This Master of the Bison was an Impressionist:* in these images, 'the momentary', says a German in 1923, 'the truth of the instant, is given with the utmost force'.

*Ah, but the Master of the Bison was a Finisher:* he was a little primitively so, no doubt, but his images on the *plafond* of Altamira were not — simply sketches. They might be without perspective, they might not be composed as we practise composition, but you could see in them, says an Englishman in 1911, 'how ancient is the striving of man after accurate and spirited representation of nature'.

Stuff, because bison and nature are not equivalents, because prehistoric artists did not care the whisk of a wild horse's tail or the stamp of a bison's hoof for the greater part of nature, because they cared nothing for equivalence of colour, and selected severely, and were not compilers of detail. But Finishers won. Prehistoric artists might be affined rather more to Impressionism, yet the Finishers had — and still have — the greater influence upon common feeling, upon common taste, and upon archaeological interpretation as well. The prehistoric painter is *so much a realist: is so obedient to nature*; and since he is most a 'realistic', and most complex, and most 'finished' and most lavish in colour on the *plafond* of Altamira, it is these bison which have been held up to us constantly for fifty years as the *ne plus ultra*, instead of the beginning of decay.

Wonderful the art of Altamira, all things considered (wonderful the high-level bridge and the low-level bridge across the bay at San Francisco), but by the time I reached Altamira and lay on my back and stared at the ceiling, I had seen enough from the millennia of prehistoric art to know that with the added fact of Late Magdalenian painting (extensions of leg to the hoof, for example), the added modelling, the added colours, and tones, the added finish, an awe of perception and apprehension and self-identification had often been lost or weakened, an 'unselfishness' had often disappeared. It was Lord Leighton, not the Master of the Polychrome Bison of Altamira, who said with his last breath 'Give my love to the Royal Academy'. Yet across the millennia, a ripeness had at any rate appealed, as I maintain, to an academic over-ripeness or degeneration; and looking back, how much I now preferred, in Magdalenian



work, the engraved cattle of Teyjat or the unrhetorical horses of Cap Blanc; and before the Magdalenian, either Late or Early, the springy Gravettian horses of Lascaux, and that tall stag engraved in Lascaux, and those tough archaic bulls of La Mouthe, and down here in Spain, those tender Gravettian hinds I had just admired at Puenteviego inside the Sacred Hill!

How many of these were 'simply sketches' — and simply drawings which contained everything, and were vision embodied and revealed by technique, but not bullied by it!

Lascaux had been full, Altamira was all but empty. A few visitors, made into ghosts by the weak illumination, wandered to the other halls and levels, unharassed by the lazy guides. I wandered with them, wandered out, and into the small, severe museum, where dust and Magdalenian scraps, including the real fossilized hoof of a real bison from excavations in the vestibule of the cave, were surveyed by the whiskered photograph of Don Marcelino de Sautuola, discoverer of these paintings and so of all cave paintings. If a little sourly, I had paid my homage and my pesetas; and I could make my own choice now of shrines less degenerate, if less chromatic.

## XVI

### The Tenderest Hinds

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IN THE DRAKENSBERG, in Natal, the finest rock-paintings left by the Bushmen are often ten or twenty miles away, one is told, from the guest-huts of a Native Reserve; to be reached only by walking or riding through rough country among noble mountains, where eland, oribi, baboons, even a leopard, may still be encountered, but not another man in a journey of two days or three days or a week. The Cantabrian cave district may not provide bison or wild horses or such a degree of satisfying isolation, but it does offer mountains, wilderness, stoniness. There may be roads — of a kind — and paths from the road to the cave, but again and again it offers a sense of having dropped out through some cullender-hole at the bottom of Europe. Visitors go to Altamira and (though not so many of them) to Puenteviego and the Sacred Hill; but how many reach La Haza and Covalanas, two caverns demanding a visit, two which offer scenery good enough for the Drakensberg, though they are no more than thirty-six or thirty-seven miles from Santander (which is twenty miles from Altamira) and fourteen miles off the highway from Santander to Bilbao? I reached the town of Ramales de la Victoria below the caves, I looked through the list of visitors to the inn, and less than a dozen foreigners had stayed there in four years. Two were English, two were Belgian and the rest of them were French. They had entered reasons for their stay. Some had put down 'tourism', some 'fishing' (there are salmon and trout and sea-trout in the river), one or two had put down 'distraction'; but none of them had written caves.

They are not the greatest caves in the hierarchy of palaeolithic art or Cantabrian art, yet what an environment! How excellent, how remote, how stony after the quietness, ordinariness, and lowliness of Altamira!

Ramales is a town of dust and the dung of mules, and of flies, unpaved, inhabited by the unshaven. Dust outside, flies rising from the *membrillo*, the quince jelly, on the counter; nothing so pure, you



think, in Ramales as the river, the Asón, green and slow, white and rapid; or as the enclosing mountains about which the clouds curl and curl again all day. Spanish towns must be judged inside, not outside — inside the walls. Inside the *fónda* it was cool, dark, clean, comfortable, shabby, and grand in shabbiness. In the dining-room, cool from a floor of polished stone, the diners were absorbed by a wall-paper of huge yellow and brown spots and blobs; the paper, the pictures, the furniture, the blue-patterned tableclothes added to a surface out of Bonnard or Vuillard in which men and women were lost; yet they were to such a degree *not* Italian, *not* German, *not* French, *not* English, not anything but Spanish, that one might have been a European among the Hittites, out of time, out of tradition, out of continent. The pleasant coolness from the stone floor touched one's ankles, one's legs, and as much of one's thighs as overlapped the chair; a fat waitress in black was noiseless altogether in her comings and goings in black *alpargatas*. A civilian official shifting his food into a hole in a yellow face was absorbed altogether into pattern; and the silence was nearly solid. Europe creeps around the Cantabrian coast; but this, a few miles inland, was absolute Spain. The huge bedroom, entered by a vestibule, had a dull-green papered ceiling above a gilt edge, a satin-sheened lighter green paper on the wall, dirty and blotted, an imperial bed, for birth, copulation, and death, a balcony above the street walled with glass, containing, on a rickety table, large plants of rust-red and pink leaves edged with green.

Outside, discounting screaming lorries, and smells — outside, geraniums, white, cherry-pink, magenta, hanging above the holes and the dust and the desiccated mule dung from each of the other large rectangular double balconies, against mountains (this was early morning) now naked for a while of their clouds. They stood around, these mountains, in a semi-circle, a boy's dream of the mountainous and precipitous; they acquired early morning colour, and early morning grain and shadow, the Pico San Vicente, regular and sharp, a little over three thousand feet, the Peña Busta, a table mountain not quite so high (often free of cloud when the point of San Vicente is enveloped), and Peña el Moro, five hundred feet short of San Vicente, sending grey precipices down almost to the streets.

Two roads, an old one quite impossible for cars, a new one nearly impossible, twist up to a pass between Peña Busta and Peña el Moro,

and between these two roads, peak to the left, peak to the right, zigzags a dry deep chasm, inside of which rain brings to life the torrent of the Rio de la Calera.

The caves are in the Peña el Moro; and they have a guide. He is young, thin, long — narrow is his better adjective — he has a narrow face, narrow hands; he smokes yellow cigarettes in a long holder, he smells a little bitter like wood anemones, he is intelligent, and in love with his circumstances. He will like it better if you drive him up to the meeting of the new road and the old road by a bridge not far below Covalanas, and not very far from the top of the pass. But if you have time and energy you can walk with him, up the old road under precipices and a tinkling of goats; in which event you will have the caves in their right order — Cullarbera, the first large inky hole into Peña el Moro (a great way in, Cullarbera contains, I believe, two or three drawings of horses in black, newly discovered, and reached only with difficulty), then La Haza, above the old road by a few steps; then a second large inky hole into the ashen face of El Moro, which is the cave of Mirón; and last of all, directly above Mirón, surmounting the precipices but invisible from below, Covalanas. (Plate facing page 160.)

Again how pleasantly the Spaniards deal with their caves! They build paths to them, such as the paths on the Sacred Hill, or this path up from the bridge to Covalanas, they observe scale and the proprieties of nature. The paths might have been there a thousand years. On the last stretch to Covalanas they have planted cherry trees; and in a cave shelter alongside, they have set a stone table, where you can sit and eat, if you have climbed up with your food, and shelter from the not improbable rain, and gaze at the animated floss of the clouds writhing around the Pica San Vicente.

Wilderness and tenderness. This, so far as I know, is the most wild, most savage of all settings for cave art (not counting the country of the rock-shelters of the different art of eastern Spain). The precipices fall away at your feet, ravens croak around the precipices, buzzards gently plane, spiral, soar, descend, on the cushions of air and light that fill the enormous valley, high, high, over the tiniest figures creeping up the old road with baskets on their backs. And now on your terrace of rock outside Covalanas a neat little door opens into a neat little hall, and the neat and narrow guide stubs his cigarette and throws it backwards over the preci-



pice, and picks up his carbide lamp from the floor, and waves a narrow hand into a neat and narrow passage, which conducts you from this savagery to the most gentle of hinds, snuffing, listening, turning round, as if filled with the being of hinds, upon this even wall, as if the hunter had been watching them that morning, while you were still in bed, after sunrise, in the valley down by the Asón or in one of the valleys above — above the pass where a new rolling heaving upland country begins.

To be more exact, the display inside Covalanas starts about eighty-two yards from the light of day with two less exhilarating animals — hinds, it is true, rather faint, and drawn, like all the animals of this cave, in a line of red spots. On the wall opposite, another red animal stretches its head towards the invisible ground, suggested to the artist, no doubt, by the ridge of rock, which he used for the line of the back, emphasizing it with a little colour. A stag, one might think at first, whose horns were never finished; the narrow guide says *bisonte*, which it resembles as much as a hedgehog resembles a lion. Ox is nearer the fact.

On the same wall there are two more deer; and then — then, on the other side, begins the wonder of this cave and of Peña el Moro, which is the Frieze of Hinds. As if she had heard the key turn in the lock at the entrance to the cave, or the clink of chain as the guide picked up his carbide lamp, the first of the hinds has turned her head round, on a slim neck, staring back towards the entrance of the cave, catching also what scent of danger may now be floating towards her on the air. One feels how often deer had been seen and admired just in that pose, by hunters in hiding, stalking, waiting. Two more hinds raise their heads and their soft throats, and snuff towards the smell or noise which has alarmed and alerted them all. A fourth and a fifth hind move away deeper into the cave. The frieze continues. A horse stands there, blunt and sulky, bearded, his mane thick, his stallion's tail raised, deer in front of him and behind him.

A curtain of rock hangs down, or rather a pelmet of smooth stone, gathered in, on the left side of the cave; behind, on the inside of the pelmet, are three more hinds, in this same red outline of dots or dabs; again, full, soft-throated, alert; though not, like the hinds on the right-hand wall, at some alarm common to all three. Two scarcely visible shapes of red colour with this group may be tread-traps.

That is all — or is all that matters; and the best of these animals do matter a great deal; they may not show well in tracings, copies, or photographs, but they are among the excellent works of animal drawing, all of them Gravettian, and all of them, again, I would suggest, by the one painter, who may also have worked in La Pasiega in the Sacred Hill, fifty miles away. Again, also, they contradict the idea that palaeolithic artists never cared for composition or arrangement in space; these hinds are disposed with a natural attraction and repulsion of shapes, much as an artist spaces out figures in his sketch book, much as he utilizes his area, shape fitted to shape, protrusion fitted to emptiness. And a wonder of these drawings is to have imparted an animal grace, so admiringly and lovingly, with a thick blotted line. I am pretty sure that the line of some of the animals, at least, was dabbed on to the rock with the tip of the artist's first finger. Or possibly he used first finger and little finger. Fingers dragged through clay are the first engraving tools, fingers dabbed in colour and dabbed to the rock are perhaps the first paint-brush. Try dabbing a shape this way on to a wall: *feel* how it goes, feel the direct 'creative' contact between your finger and the rock, with no insensitive intermediary tool.

Hinds in La Pasiega, which the same artist may have drawn, are made into the most delicate creatures by means of this same apparently clumsy, certainly rather primitive, technique, in which it seems that the draughtsman sometimes stopped dabbing the colour to drag it into an actual line.

A black goat bleated upon the steps of La Haza, the devil inviting us to a cave a little disappointing, and peculiar only in respect of its smallness and shallowness. An ash tree stands in front, half hiding the ghostly-grey reflective surface of the Pico San Vicente on the far side of the sharply intervening chasm; the cave was no more than a chantry chapel or a little anchorite's cell upheld by four pillars of stalagmite. At the foot of these pillars which unite in one mass of rock, a seat has been cut, on which the guide leaves a carbide lamp only just required for a few paintings in red on a surface anciently scalloped by the rush of water. A chapel of horses, chiefly, some drawn, as in Covalanas up above, with a dotted or blotted line, but none of them in their present state at all to be remarked or remembered. Somewhere else, one feels, behind the fall and face of



this mountain many more animals in red are locked away, waiting to be discovered and delivered.

Meanwhile it was Mirón I wanted to enter, half way up between these two painted caves. It would be a pity, I knew, to disappear without any investigation of this great mouth, in which they had read signs of palaeolithic settlement; so after the narrow guide had left, having displayed photographs of himself with the salmon he had caught in his green river and having smoked elegantly another of his yellow cigarettes, and having referred to a little notebook of squared pages to give me the height of all the surrounding peaks, I took a middle path to Mirón — a goat path. Raven's feathers lay on the stones, a party of ravens rose noisily from the arches surrounding Mirón and launched themselves up the precipice; and a chittering from a wild fig-tree rooted over the cave announced a different bird, black as charcoal save for the downward flash of a chestnut tail and rump — a black redstart, bird of London bomb ruins, feeding a late family.

I take it on trust that enormous Mirón was occupied by man in palaeolithic times. I could see it was certainly used by him in present times. Bottles lay about, old alpargatas, and scraps of wire, scraps of wood, in a mess of hay and cinders. Walls against the side of the mouth of the cave suggested either houses or cattle pens, and across the mouth grow plants attracted to man's rubbish or to the soil he disturbs — nettles, and Dwarf Elder in a small forest of its flowers and leaves.

There were more signs of Polyphemus here than at Labastide. The walls, though, were not his handiwork. They had been built, more likely by the Basque guerrillas who made a mountain stronghold of Mirón in the Carlist War of the eighteen-thirties. This was Carlist country, and up to the cave Basque supporters of Don Carlos the pretender dragged a gun to command the pass, and here across the rocks and the slopes and the Dwarf Elder they were attacked by no less a general than Baldomero Espartero, *El pacificador de España*.

A slope of earth and goat dung and waterworn pebbles rises steeply into darkness at the back of the cave, nearly blocking the way. Beyond this hill, the tunnel of the cave becomes flatly irregular, and just back from daylight, a pit and a trench suggest that archaeological investigation was rather rough and primitive. Perhaps Mirón

was the Castillo cavern — minus the paintings — of the Peña el Moro, perhaps it was the home of the palaeolithic hunters who had their shrines in Covalanas and La Haza, and Cullarbera, and elsewhere, possibly, inside the mountain.

Coming from darkness to the forecourt of Mirón, the hunters looked over the enormous valley into country excellent for their stags and hinds; and if (not very sensibly) you continue by car up the pass, above Covalanas, under the remaining precipices of El Moro, and take the semblance of a road wiggling from Lanetosa village in the direction of Bilbao, you invade a huge upland of heaving, rolling hills which would have been excellent, too, for their wild horses.

Eastward again in the Basque province of Vizcaya, you may have the same experience — no line of cars, no lining up for the guide, no impatience from him, no patter off by heart — when you reach Santimamiñe; though not for much longer, perhaps, now they plan to make a road across to the mountain of Ereñusarre, and almost to the cave, in which masons have been newly at work, fitting ladders and bridges and chipping out new steps. If you come the sensible way into Spain, past Biarritz and over the river and the border at Irun, then Santimamiñe will be your first, and Covalanas your second cave of importance. If you are making a retreat towards France and England, Covalanas, and then Santimamiñe, in the reverse order, can give you your final contrasts of pleasure — different animals, different styles of art, caves different altogether, in different settings, sixty miles or so between them.

Guernica is the base, a new town after those thunder-showers of high explosive which made it famous through the world; and not an unpleasant town if the sun happens to be out and if a fresh sea-wind blows through its pale characterless streets from the Golfo de Vizcaya eight or nine miles away. It has been rebuilt in much the same feeble style as Plymouth. You take the road which will lead on from Guernica to the coast — to Lequeito and the little fishing ports where fat women toboggan the most enormous tunny fish along the quays in their own blood and slime. A mile or two out of Guernica you pass through the long street of the village of Cortezubi, almost joined to a second village where the wise man will ask, and take the offer of anyone willing to guide him to the *ermita* and the cave of Santimamiñe, more exactly to the *ermita* of St Michael — by a lane



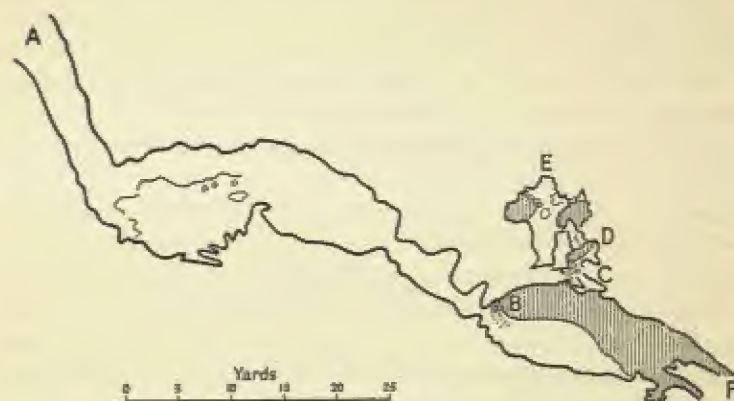
into the valley, past a washing place on the stream, through fields of corn and maize (marrows grow among the maize; and beans, which have the maize for bean-sticks), then up through farmyards, past dogs which bark but intend no harm, to a last farmyard and farmhouse of Lezika, the home of Felix Bengoechea, the guide to the cavern (it was his father, I think, who found the first drawings in the cave, in 1916).

As you climb to his house through all this open-aired prosperity, past little sheaves of corn cut with sickles and tied with wisps of straw, past harrows made of iron chisels thrust at an angle through wooden frames, and rollers made of stone, and small carts with solid, iron-bound, iron-studded wheels which revolve with, not on, their axles, like the chariot of Boadicea, the mountain leans away from you, all the time, like one triangular face of the Great Pyramid. From the farm a brief watershed leads the way between potatoes and vines and tomatoes, all blue with copper sulphate; above this ridge you come to the chapel of St Michael, old and rough, tiled like a farmhouse, on a platform of grass and pine trees.

The lines which take electricity to the cave show the way wearily upwards through the scrub on the face of the Pyramid, this face of a Michael's Mount. The archaeologists who worked on the cave between the two world wars emptied out of the first yards an immensity of filling, which they threw down the slope of the mountain. Grass and flowers have covered the spill, steps have been set into it, and a horse chestnut has been planted before the entrance, which is shut by an iron grille, an iron coat of arms and the name Santi-mamiñe. As you climb the steps you can pick up oyster shells thrown out from the later upper layers of occupation in the mouth of the cave; which was frequented from Aurignacian times to Roman times. (Plate facing page 161.)

The Abbé Breuil came here in 1917, a year after the paintings were found; the cave (of which his account is altogether too brief and misleading) was then only fifty yards or so long; and even to that depth must have been a crawl and a drop and a climb. Clearance of the mouth and a breaking of stalactite barriers have now revealed an up and down and devious cave piercing far into the pyramid; less a cave of stalactites than of folds and flows and sparkling cascades, white or milk-chocolate against a predominance of cave orange or the deepest cave apricot. Here and there the rock has been cut, showing

the dull limestone below its glittering calcite skin. Some of this colour, some of these shapes, certainly sparkled in whatever light Magdalenian man carried into Santimamiñe; though the first and best drawings come not very far in from the heat and light of the day.



- |   |                         |
|---|-------------------------|
| A. Entrance   | D. Antechamber          |
| B. Steep descent  | E. Chamber of Paintings |
| C. Ascent by ladder to the Antechamber and Chamber of Paintings | F. Continuation of cave |

#### 6. Plan of Santimamiñe

Downhill, first of all, into a cleft; then up a new steel ladder (painted with new red paint, which came off on the hands: the temptation was to make positive hand-prints along the rock); at the head of the ladder, an orange tunnel, not very long, broadening a little, and revealing two bison and a horse in black line, and a few engraved animals, fairly distinct. But these are no more than an appetizer. The tunnel ends in a niche, in a small, low, more or less circular cupboard or room which might be in the thickness and circumference of a turret — or somewhere cramped and plated inside the depths of an Atlantic liner. Startling in the light of an electric bulb too feeble for accurate examination, not quite feeble enough for mystery, you observe drawings all around. Add the force of two carbide lamps, and these drawings reveal themselves as bison two by two. Facing you there is an orange surface of flowstone, and on a pleat in this



flow two bison are drawn vertically, one with tail held erect, the other with tail up and curved, though they are head to head.

Turn a little left, turn round, there is a sloping wall behind you: more bison, two and two in black line or black line with a little black shading. Two of them stand tail to tail, then two more, below them, in the same attitude. To the right, a bison inhabits a little concave depression in the rock; and beyond him, a little higher, are the two most skilfully drawn bison I have ever seen in a cave, following each other, this time, head to tail. The artist has dealt with that problem of unwieldiness, heaviness, lumpiness, which interferes with the depicted bison of Niaux or Altamira, or Font-de-Gaume; he has placed on these damp walls fully contoured energetic animals, whose being is not crushed by their bulk, whose heads and whole bodies concentrate a powerful 'isness' of the species without being too much the image out of a mirror.

These two animals head to tail, bull and cow, are not very large — not longer, I should estimate, than thirty inches apiece; but they are four-legged and complete and poised and possible.

A cone of stalagmite rises from the floor: it is much darkened, but still one can discern on it yet another pair of bison. Also in this same small cupboard of rock, there is a wild horse drawn in black (with bison in pairs around him), blunt, sullen, full and nervous, though the artist gives him only one leg fore and one leg aft for the four legs which the bison possess; and across the orange flowstone, next to the vertical bison, extends perhaps the best of all cave drawings of a bear — by his profile the smaller brown bear, and not the great cave bear. The cave bear (as in Las Monedas in the Sacred Hill) is always distinguished by a forehead rising abruptly above the eyes. This bear has for company a stag and a horse — all three drawings now faint to a casual glance, distinct when the lamps are held aright.

It is these late Magdalenian animals which raise Santimamiñe to a level with Covalanas; and they have all the more effect by being concentrated into this cupboard or cubbyhole in the rock, scarcely large enough to contain three people at the same time. This narrow space sixty yards inside the mountain of Ereñusarre is heavy with unusual fecundity and perfection, with the pairing of creatures and with their line, their volume and vital character.

Their preservation, their isolation figure by figure, without any superimposing, leave nothing in doubt, nothing to be guessed at.

There were ibex and other bison I missed in Santimamiñe, though we climbed down ladders, up ladders, down ladders again, and crossed grilles and bridges deeper and deeper into the spectacle of the cave. From the ladder below the rock-cupboard of the fertility of bison, the way forward goes through an unnaturally natural doorway, a rectangle in a flow of calcite, and beyond that door I saw only a remnant of a bison in black and an incomplete outline of a horse, the animal whose bones predominated in the excavations, though there were bones also of ox and bison.

Outside the cave Guernica collects its red roofs and white walls in calmness, in the trough of a huge prospect across cultivated hills and sparse pines to veil upon veil of mountain blue, against a paler blue of sky. By the path pink flowers of centaury grow in a shadow which seems more full of light than all the open day of an English hillside.

Felix Bengoechea interrupted his own jokes and turned a key, and light filled the whole wide whitewashed interior of the chapel of the saint down below the cave, empty, floored roughly with red bricks except where rock thrust itself up above floor-level. Behind the open chestnut-timbering of the roof the whitewash took on a blue tinge; and above each of the three altars country dolls were perched, representing the Virgin, St Anthony, and St Michael, prince of the host of heaven. A holy well trickles nearby.

Every seventh of August there is a fiesta here under the pines, a corroborree which might not displease the hunters of the cave.



## XVII

### The Cave of the Lilies

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EASTWARD OF SANTANDER another cave (with another chapel, as it turned out) called more insistently than all the caves either of France or of Spain. I liked the name of this cave — the Cueva del Pindal, which could be fitted to a necklace of names, Cherrapunji, Coromandel, Tinian, Famagusta, Stonehenge, Botallack, Macao, Skellig Michael, Mergui; and coupled with the name were two facts; that Pindal is a sea-cave, or rather a cave in a cliff above the sea: and that one image from inside occurs intriguingly and tantalizingly in a score of books upon the archaeology of man.

This is the drawing of an elephant with a red, red heart.

Hope will feed remarkably upon a name; and at any rate the country along the coast beyond Altamira — by a minor road with a surface not too rattly, for once, merely turning a car into travelling castanets — is at first one of limestone hills and valleys, and green fields with sink-holes and grey walls and the phenomena of limestone surfaces; a country also of roses and bougainvillaea against houses, of palms which are squat reverend vegetables, or generous exotic vegetable fountains; and of unexpectedly blue plantations of eucalyptus. At times the coast is Irish, as in Co. Clare: the fields are small and irregular, though not all of them are hedged with stone, and they run to the very edge of the cliff.

Yellow beaches succeed one another, small old towns occur at intervals — Comillas (armorial bearings, very grand, provincially carved on stone mansions turned into hotels; streets and plaza cobbled in rectangles, a chemist's shop with busts of Galen and Hippocrates, a town with wide beaches a little crushed, for all its charming dignity, by the dream tonnage of a marquis's palace turned into an enormous Universidad Pontificada); then, set back more shabbily in a fiord, San Vicente de la Barquera; followed by Unquera at last, where Oviedo province and the ancient kingdom of Asturias begin.

Rain sweeps inland from the Mar Cantabrico, which lies as sulky, sunless, lifeless, and slate blue at times as the Severn Sea between the foliated cliffs of North Devon and the cruel limestone cliffs of the Gower; and in the wet weather men and women lift themselves above the damp and the mud on *madrenas*, which are wooden shoes on three short stubby legs, a cross between sabot and clog. Cross the long mediaeval bridge into San Vicente, and you change from a damp cheerfulness of limestone and greenery to a superimposition, for a while, of sour darkening hills of sandstone, closing like Symplegades upon the various fiords, or sunken and now estuarine river valleys, first the Rio de S. Vicente, then the Rio Tina Menor and the Rio Tina Mayor, at Unquera.

Hope begins to waver at these black hills. Will it have been worth castanetting along the Spanish roads to Pindal? Will it be like coming to New Orleans, and finding Canal Street, which is less graceful than Wigan on a wet Saturday? Like coming to a hot spring in Iceland and finding a dirty steaming corner of an industrial gasworks? Or like expecting the Great Poet, and meeting the prissy equivocating solicitor's clerk?

And how to get there? The landmark for Pindal is the lighthouse — El Faro di San Emeterio; and to the lighthouse there are signs, but not to the cave, not even to the village of Pimiango, which is also near the cave.

What should be Pimiango, at last, appears on a ridge between the road and the sea, appears isolated against the sky and altogether inaccessible above a wild wood of eucalyptus, appears even to be getting further and smaller instead of larger and nearer; until the road-system relents, and a turning at last invites one again to the lighthouse, and so by inference to the village and the cave.

Dusty, unpaved little Pimiango, on this black ridge above these blue eucalyptus trees, has a few shops and a pueblo, and a bust of a hero, a dapper lieutenant-colonel with a clerk's face killed in Africa in 1924. Dignified farmers walk unsmilingly in from their fields, a scythe over their shoulder, and a black *cachapa* hitched to their trousers, the *cachapa* being a wooden case for the whetstone. About fifty years ago the first of the cave-hunting archaeologists found a village to which they climbed by a capricious footpath, where everything was primitive, where strangers were unknown, and through which they were followed by a fly-horde of dirty questioning



children. But it is only a last trial, this dusty, confused and confusing Pimiango, where the children still follow you, where the hens peck each other's nude rumps among straw, and filth lies between the houses, and signposts to El Faro give out, and each lane seems private or impassable — where, in brief, the scrubbiest and most private-seeming lane of them all continues hard and firm, in spite of appearances, through the soft muck, through the fields (the coast and the sea on one side and all of the grand Picos de Europa on the other); and then dives down over the escarpment of sandstone, and deposits one in a dingle or a chine, delightful beyond all the possible conceivable promise enshrined inside the name Pindal.

In fact below Pimiango and Pindal the sandstone ends, and the limestone emerges. Smooth, bare, too regular wedges of sandstone meadow slope duskily to a supermarine ledge — a ledge of limestone cut back, fretted, pocked, indented with light-coloured cliffs and black sea-caves. The ledge is sometimes grassy, sometimes pleated, tufted, muffled with foliage; in sheltered corners, in sub-dells and sub-dingles of limestone, there grow tangles of eucalyptus, sweet chestnut, evergreen oak, and smilax scrub. Everywhere there are limestone flowers. The heavenly blue of that flower of the caves, *Lithospermum diffusum*, sparkles through every inch of the scrub.

Add to the flowers and the frettedness of rock a lazy noise of the Mar Cantabrico (which is the Atlantic, after all), without energy in this corner between France and Spain; a noise, too, of gulls, and intermittent clanking and hug-hugging of one single motorboat in a desert sea.

Add a couple of houses, small, squalid, covered in red tiles, both rooted into a few fields and a few bushes; add below the houses a long, old, decayed, bell-rutted church or chapel; and across the supermarine ledge, from outside the lighthouse gates — *prohibido el paso* — where the track comes to an end, a long fretted view over the sea across the inlet and the cleft below the ledge and the two cottages and the church; in which cleft the cave must somewhere be concealed. Indeed here a notice does point down into the centre of greenness, into such a dell as might have been painted symbolically by Samuel Palmer; saying, at last, *La Cueva del Pindal*.

A dog barks from under a shed; a squarishly built dog, who bristles his back — but is chained; carnations trail down from the

windows, brilliant in the wet air. Here the farmer, who is brown and smiles only with the stumps of his teeth, holds the key into Pindal. A sandy path goes on past his orchard, a little brambled over, as though not so many people came here, after all. Daughters, daughters-in-law, children — even the lighthouse keeper — walk down towards the cave, doing honour to a stranger; and the path in this green bower comes to an edge, it zigzags down by steps into a slit running to the sea, it reaches a tiny meadow, naturally walled with limestone on three sides, open towards the bay, or plunging steeply in that direction to a detritus of chunks. This little meadow is scythed; at the back, the transverse strata of limestone are cut by a long opening, not very high, which is barred by an iron fence.

Never had I found a cave entrance, a forecourt to a cave, more inappropriately and divertingly appropriate, and more felicitous. It had been a drama of felicity all the way down from the dust and muck of Pimiango, down over the sandstone slopes where every ditch was filled with Royal Fern, as if it had been on another part of the coast of Ireland, not of Spain. Then — gardens of limestone; and now, in the labyrinthine centre of it all, the sea-lip garden of Pindal.

I recall that flowers in the mouth of a cave drew attention to the Kesslerloch or 'Tinker's Hole' in Switzerland. It was a schoolmaster out botanizing who was drawn, in 1873, inside the Kesslerloch by a wonderful display of mere Jack-by-the-Hedge. After a year's excavation he picked out of the cave earth and the reindeer bones a piece of antler engraved with the admirable and celebrated Browsing Reindeer. But here! Here, though already I had seen in France and Spain such a diversity of cavern flowers! On the seaward flank of the meadow the scythe had smoothly scalloped out an edging of rough grass. Between this edge and the sea fifty feet below, what flowers were growing, in a wild maritime abundance! Blue columbines, yellow snapdragons, fleabane, red (or rather pink) valerian, tutsan, wild asparagus, dusky yellow lilies, then a tangle of wild vine and wild fig-tree, and sea spleenwort, huge fronds of it, double the length they grow in Cornwall, and sea pinks and samphire among the grey jumble of blocks diving out of sight into the green sea water; which slapped the rocks, and slapped them and tucked them; and boomed alongside, as well, into a sea-cave.



The isolated sea-pinnacle of La Lanchuca, 'the little boat', stands up exactly opposite the meadow, the flowers, and the cave.

Splendidly lacking, all this, in palaeolithic austerity; even in the blackness, for example, of the cliff-caves of Bacon Hole or Paviland above the Severn Sea. But how Pindal — so far — lived up to the magnetic attraction of its own syllables!

Unexpectedly Pindal is electrified — though the bulbs do not always work and are not placed at every point in its great corridor where light is really needed. The cave is wide and high, recalling Labastide; yet not so very high in relation to its width. The roof tends to a flatness, though hung with stalactites here and there; the floor is black mud, or a stream-bed of stones without a stream: There are no difficulties, no real dangers, though now and again a drop or a hole in the floor requires to be circumvented.

Must I offer a feebleness after finery? Situation, rock, sea, dusky Pyrenean Lilies and all considered, must I admit that the paintings and the engravings of Pindal (most of them Magdalenian) are no great shakes? That the elephant with the red, red heart is a bit of fraud, if not on the wall, then certainly as he appears in the textbooks of the prehistorian?

Everything is easily found — if you carry an extra light to eke out the feebleness of the bulbs. Hanging rocks along one wall of the cave — on the right — are marked with red spots and bars, with red signs or conventions for female organs of sex, with faded bison, a small head and neck of a horse, and what are called 'club' signs, in red (to me they suggest handles with a stone axe-head fitted on one side). Six of these signs look as distinct as can be across a pendent tongue of limestone; and above them a bison appears, engraved and painted. There are more groups, or trails, of prints in red. There is an engraved horse, then a hind in red, and the head and back and tail of a horse engraved upside down. One humped piece of rock drawn upon and around, and turned into a bison, has split away and now lies tucked into the angle of the wall and floor. Far into the cave (which ends after nearly four hundred yards) a stone under the right-hand wall serves as a step for examining a tunny which swims across the rock, engraved, not painted (though engraved across three now very faint bars of red); deeper still comes at last that red figure of an elephant, again not the mammoth, not hairy, but the Wood Elephant of a warmer climate, encountered already in white Cougnac,

and in the extreme depth of Castillo. His fame has gone round, on account of the blob of red within the red line, more or less in the region of the elephant's heart.

Details of Pindal, details of this pre-Magdalenian Elephant, were published in a great volume in 1911, three years after a Spanish archaeologist had detected ancient drawings in the cave. The reproduction of the elephant, published and published again, shows in that blob more or less our conventional sign for a heart. I had never quite believed it. Did they so long ago make use of that convention for a heart which we use (in hearts in a pack of cards, for example)? Was there really an Aurignacian elephant in a cave flaunting an ace of hearts? Yes, archaeologists repeated gravely, from one book into the next. If it was heart-like once, when the cavern was first studied nearly fifty years ago, it is heart-like no longer. I doubt indeed if it ever was heart-like; and observe that it was described, first of all, not as a heart, but as *une large tache à peu près cordiforme, placée au milieu du corps*, indicating *le pavillon de l'oreille*. Archaeologists can nod.

There was nothing else to notice at this depth, away in from the daylight and sea-light of the entrance, except a few black designs on the opposite side of the cavern; a tolerable stag, for example, on the face of a chunk of limestone bedded in the swarthy softness of the floor. Pindal, though, must be forgiven for all its deficiencies — of that kind; a cave (it would have been higher above the sea, like the Bacon Hole or Paviland Cave in the Gower, during Upper Palaeolithic times) frequented not only by the hunters of horse and bison, but by men who knew and already caught those tunny fish still landed from the red and green fishing boats at every port along this coast, Guetaria, Zumaya, Motrico, Ondárroa, Lequeito, along to Laredo, Santona and Santander, San Vicente, Unquera, Llanes. The bison and wild horses have gone, the tunny remain in wild waters, to be caught by the men who also remain. Also Pindal has inside a certain black grandeur and grimness, a long black prospect, betrayed by the feeble twinkling of the bulbs, which would have delighted Piranesi, or John Martin busy upon the caverns of Hell, or some cooler artist of his tempestuous and cavernous era.

Add to all of these things — to cave and fish and flowers and the green sea — San Emeterio himself, St Emeterius the Martyr. He as well must not be overlooked, under the sea-hills on this ledge of



fretted and flowery limestone. He owns the lighthouse, he owns the mediaeval chapel above this cave of ceremonies older than his own, a building with a long open yard of tiles and timbering, which faces the sea across the sunken curves of an orchard (this orchard has a *natural* fence of limestone). Inside his chapel, whitewashed walls are enclosed within archings and vaultings of the sandstone quarried in the hill. Stone benches run down the sides of the empty nave — 'the weakest go to the wall'. Left of the altar hang arms and legs moulded hollow from candlewax; for St Emeterius has worked miracles of curing — or rather his well has done so, which is no more than a muddy, dungy spring in the lane between the chapel and the farm. A martyr of miracles. With a St Celedonius he was beheaded at Calahorro, the Roman city of Calagurris, on the Ebro, in Logroño province, where his body and his companion's body are kept. Their heads floated bobbishly down the Ebro into the Mediterranean, turned south and west through the straits of Gibraltar, and floated up the coast of Portugal, conversing with each other, one may think, edifyingly among the waves and then round the corner into the Cantabrian Sea, finding rest, peace, and honour inside the dull cathedral at Santander. Perhaps, in passing, the head of St Emeterius touched below the cave and chapel of Pindal.

His feast is March 3. Then a mass is celebrated at Pindal, either in the chapel, or if the weather allows in the rock-guarded sunken sea-orchard, at an altar roofed with its own red tiles supported on stone pillars.

I like to think of a continuity, however dim, however unlikely, stretched however far (by present standards of the passage of time) through however vast a length of years. Magdalenian hunters and fishermen, and Gravettians, and Aurignacians before them, have a shrine of the increase of fish, bison, horses, and deer, inside the cave: above, as if some reputation for sanctity and power endured at Pindal, another shrine is established and maintained, and you have the chapel, the holy well, the altar of the saint, just as bison-cave and shrine and holy well are neighbours at Santimamiñe.

If no one can prove or disprove continuities of such a kind, are they impossible?

Down by the cave I picked tutsan leaves and put them inside my notebook, since they are leaves which develop a fragrance as they dry. The fragrance lasts, and reminds me now of Pindal. As for the

lilies above the slapping of the sea, these were Yellow Turk's Cap or *Lilium pyrenaicum*, their yellow petals minutely speckled with black. I turned the species up afterwards in an English gardening book — 'low growing', 'very inferior', 'easy to grow', 'nasty smelling' (true), and 'a thing of no beauty'; which is wildly, wildly untrue.



## XVIII

### The Cave of the Snails

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IT WAS NOT QUITE so wise a decision to go on to Buxu, among the Picos de Europa. I should have been content, a little way along the coast beyond Unquera, beyond Pindal and Pimiango, with the very beautiful, wide lonely bay of La Franca (which has a small hotel facing the rocks, the sand, the sea, and the blue-black thunderstorms over the Bay of Biscay) and with the low cave of Mazaculos which looks down on to La Franca, on to eucalyptus hills, and to cattle lazily cooling themselves in green pools of the Bedon river.

In Mazaculos, just above the road and the river bridge you find no more of art than a few red bars and splodges, high in a clean recess, probably of the Middle Stone Age; and in the floor you see a vast quantity of shells — limpets, winkles, top-shells — compacted into a breccia and cemented to the rock. Here and there scraps of flint lie on the surface.

Buxu, though, had something of the magnetic force of Pindal, pulling me by its name through heat and mist, or the mizzle of warm rain, making me lunch among dripping chestnut trees upholstered in moss, on ground stitched with Ivy-leaved Bellflower and threaded with the unconcerned pale blue and pale green spires of *Lobelia urens*, Acrid Lobelia, so rare, so sacrosanct at home, in Devon and Dorset and Cornwall, but in Asturias weedy, common, saved by its bitter white juice from horses and cattle. Buxu drew me on for mile after mile, through gorge after gorge, a long way to the west, until I discovered in a general-store-cum-skittle-alley where to find the key, where to cross the river Güeña beside the mountain road, and how to climb up past or through the mountain village of Cardes to come to terms with the cave.

Two farmers indeed detached themselves as guides along a trail or lane of the era of pack-mules and donkeys, past a mill, up and over small stone footbridges beside fords, past tall granaries of dark chestnut wood perched on staddles of wood and stone; past dogs unexpectedly amiable, past extremely old women with skin so

creased and folded that it was not like skin; past the village which was less planned and unified than a village on an African mountain — all this journey tilted at an acute angle — up to a higher valley under a low ceiling of clouds altogether concealing the seven thousand feet and eight thousand feet of the Picos de Europa, past chestnut trees and walnut trees, past fields of maize and potatoes fenced with enormous split pales, past cherries glittering in the mist, below improbable lines conveying electricity all the way up to this Cueva del Buxu, which perhaps means the Cave of the Owl, and which certainly presents an owl-like face, a double entrance of two black owl's eyes with a beak of stone, across its mountain valley.

And all for what? A narrow cave, behind a curly ornamental gate, in which women and children from Cardes took refuge during some of the fighting of the Civil War. A narrow cave of engravings difficult to find (though the bulbs are well placed), and of a remnant of drawings in black — horses, stags, hinds, ibex, a bison, and tectiforms; all of them early Magdalenian; the tectiforms more roof-shaped or house-shaped than most, recalling the painted summer 'hut' inside, and the actual hut under the trees outside, La Mouthe; and perhaps indeed homes in this cave for ancestral spirits rather than traps for animals.

I paid for that adventure, for if there is no great drama inside Buxu, there is drama enough either going or returning on the direct road, across — or decidedly *through* — the mountains from Cangas de Onís to the coast at Unquera. South of the road rise the Picos de Europa up to peaks where the ibex and chamois of palaeolithic hunters still exist, north of the road the Sierra de Cuera cuts off the sea; but as you dive and twist and come near the precipices and cross sides by an accursed bridge which gives you the outside position once more, as you see the pools of the river below you all too clearly, as you trust there will not be another lorry towing a lorry around the next corner where the narrow road gets narrower, you have less a sense of mountains than a sense of enclosure, indeed of closure, defile and danger. Again and again armies had to take such Spanish roads — in snow — in the Peninsular War, and in Spanish civil wars. Down such defiles, down this one along the green Rio Cares, the glaciers of the Picos de Europa sent roaring melt-water and clattering boulders in the time of the hunters of Buxu or Cova-



lanas or Altamira; and even now — at least under cloud and rain — the savagery is nearly too savage.

Should I have preferred, as I sometimes think, the post-palaeolithic life of the shellfish eaters of Mazaculos, and a score of other caves or shelters along the Asturian edges of the sea? An unheroic life, no doubt. I had broken off a piece of the shell-breccia of Mazaculos, gay top-shells still showing their pink and purple, small limpets, and mussels, part of what was once a great mound of shells almost closing the cave and shutting off a view of the river and the bay. Shell mounds of this kind have been analysed. They contained bones of animals as well — wild boar and cattle, wild horse and deer and ibex and chamois: but the solid proportion of shells to bones was about seven to one. Life had been transformed, in days which were damp and temperate: Old Stone Age had become Middle Stone Age or mesolithic, and the first great art of mankind had dwindled, weakened, disappeared — at least in its old centres of vision and technique.

Mzaculos and its shells and its shell-fish collectors, who padded along the beaches of La Franca instead of pursuing bison like their ancestors or predecessors of Buxu and Altamira, come rather late in the transformation, in the new western Europe, when the melting of the glaciers had raised the sea-level, when trees had replaced a park-tundra and winds blew less chill, and rain and sunlight had charmed a thicker carpeting of vegetation across the limestone rocks and soils and hills and mountains.

*Azilian*, not *Asturian*, is the key; which means travelling back from Spain into France, from Asturias to Ariège once more, from the low roof of Mazaculos to the enormity of the vaulting of Mas d'Azil, not the town, but the cavern, which we came so near, yet never entered some chapters ago.

Around Le Mas d'Azil, around the 'House of Azil', if you remember, the hills below the Pyrenees concealed shrine after shrine of the hunters, Niaux and Bédheillac, Le Portel and Les Trois Frères, Marsoulas, Gargas, Labastide. But among them all no cave has quite the exaggerated, rhetorical grandeur of the Mas. From the town a road which is smooth and civilized, after the roads of Asturias or Santander, goes uphill and bends and enters the Mas d'Azil under an arch more than two hundred feet high, clear by many

yards of the tall ash trees rooted down by the river, the Arize, which also runs through the cave from light to light. Once beyond the arch, the river in the semi-darkness is heard rather than detected, and the road sweeps at a higher level in a glow-worm illumination from neon panels spaced in diminishing perspective along a concrete wall. (Frontispiece.)

The scale of this natural nave under the rock is stunning at the first entry. Has any other cave of the prehistorians a subterranean car-park, for example, in front of a dimly illuminated subterranean ticket-office?

A huge cave system on different levels climbs into the half-shadow, shadow, and blackness above the car-park and the ticket-office. A guide, if you care for the trip, will harry you through passages, aisles, transepts, and chambers stinking and a-twitter with bats (sometimes regaling the most innocent of ears with the most sexy and most improbable pudding of prehistory and folklore — tales of women who wrapped themselves in bear skins and waited on a slab of rock for the God of the Cave, a Great Cave Bear God, no doubt); and will take you to another gloomy Chaire-à-Calvin, or Calvinist rock-pulpit, recalling that in 1625, in the time of Richelieu, a couple of thousand sturdy Calvinists of Ariège were besieged here for two months (Albigensians or Cathar heretics also had taken refuge in this cave in the Middle Ages).

Magnificent, this great underground 'House of Azil'; and no doubt it deserves the tens of thousands who visit it (for each one who ever climbs into the Asturian shell-grotto of Mazaculos). But why, since it contains only a few palaeolithic paintings and engravings which are not of the most vivid importance and are not always shown, should the Mas d'Azil deserve a visit from the wanderer in search of prehistoric art? Because, in a way, it was the Mas d'Azil which wrote or indicated, before any other site or cave, the end of the whole story, much as Goar's Hole in the Gower Peninsula, so long ago and so many chapters ago, wrote its beginning.

A road was driven through the Mas d'Azil, to begin with, in 1857. The torrent of the Arize swept it away in 1875 and it was built again, enlarged, and made more secure; and just as discoveries along the Vézère and the Mediterranean (by Grimaldi) were due to new railways, so discoveries at the Mas d'Azil were now due to the builders of this second road — in that same year in which Don Marcelino de



Sautuola happened to see, without much concern, the first black drawing inside Altamira. The engineers cut through the gravel on the right-hand bank of the Arize to level a platform for the road, and they found themselves working through a deposit of bones. So Édouard Piette came and excavated upon either bank of this subterranean quarter of a mile, on the left bank where the Arize bends and sweeps into the cave, and some way down on the right bank, beyond the place where the cars are now parked, in what is known as the Salle Édouard Piette. He came to Magdalenian levels. Engravings, carvings, were recovered, objects decorated with likenesses of horse, bison, ibex, oxen, even birds and fish. More recently, in 1937, Magdalenian levels here in the Mas d'Azil yielded one of the most elegant and most curious of palaeolithic carvings — a shaggy dog joke, one might think, of the Magdalenians. This was a spear-thrower with a baby chamois at one end, its hoofs, all four of them, together, as though on a crag. It turns its head to regard, with a quizzical innocence, not so much the *enorme boudin de matière plus gros qu'il serait de nature*, to quote the learned French guidebook to Le Mas, which this fawn *expulse de son anus dilaté*, as two small birds which are perched upon the *boudin*, billing and cooing, without attention either to their perch or the circumstances — or the chamois.

Evidently the Mas d'Azil was an important station for the Magdalenians, long occupied by them. But in the layer above — immediately above — the Magdalenian tools and bones, Piette found different relics, arguing a different life and livelihood and philosophy. There were no engravings, no carvings, no bones of the reindeer. Instead, those small water-worn pebbles of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris or the dusty cases in the bug-coloured museum at Toulouse, painted with symbols and shapes in red ochre — blotches, spots, stripes, lines, circles; and, instead of the old 'harpoons' skilfully made of reindeer horn and used against reindeer by the Magdalenians, only rougher, coarser 'harpoons' made from the softer antlers of the red deer. There were no needles, for stitching clothes against the old sub-arctic weather.

In place of the tender heroic animals delineated on the wall, new artists now reduced painting to these pebble designs (or to similar abstract designs sometimes painted over the animals in the caves, as in Marsoulas), still in the sacred, life-giving red ochre, still objects perhaps of life and power and the increase of species, akin to the

small painted *tjuringa* objects which are sacramentally treasured by Australians. These new dwellers in the Mas d'Azil may have eaten boar when they could, to judge by the bones, and oxen, and brown bear, and stags and hinds; but Piette also uncovered their hearths, and with the hearths beds of the shells of the very much smaller deer they had collected and eaten — the Grovè Snails of a damper, warmer, less heroic world of beech forests and moss and leafmould and undergrowth, which gained upon the old world of taiga and tundra and big game. 'Asylienne', or Azilian, Piette named this new culture of descendants of the old Magdalenian hunters, Azilians of the Middle Stone Age, who were eaters of snails no less than the later Middle Stone Age Asturians of Mazaculos above the Bay of La Franca were humble eaters of limpet and winkle. And as Gravettians had brought their pre-Magdalenian culture to England close up to the limits of the ice at Creswell Crags, so these Azilians brought their post-Magdalenian culture, now that the glaciers had melted away so far to the north, all of the way to Scotland, to Oban on the west coast, on the Firth of Lorne, and out to the Isle of Oronsay.

Three or four thousand years go by of Middle Stone Age hunters and fishers, snail-eaters and shell-fish eaters, squatters by lake and meres among the forests, and along the coasts of Europe and in swamps gradually flooded by the North Sea, and men — new men of the New Stone Age, new stock of *Homo sapiens* out of the East again — bring with them the great revolution of plants and animals made to grow and to breed and increase at command. Under the arch of the Mas d'Azil, for example, layers topping the Azilian speak next of cave-dwellers of the New Stone Age with their pots and their polished and neatly chipped weapons and tools of stone, then of men using bronze, and last of Gauls with their glass and weapons of iron.

Back in Mas d'Azil, in the small town, not the cave, outside the old-fashioned, over-furnished, shabby, comfortable hotel in which gilt mirrors abound, and *chaises longues* upholstered in green, and *chaises percées*; under the plane trees, tired and contentedly working a way through a dinner of fresh trout and veal and local cheese and peaches and two dozen of the most perfectly confectioned snails — a somewhat Azilian meal — I have pondered those shells and those painted pebbles excavated by Piette. 'It was the Azilian snail,' French archaeologists have remarked, 'which killed the art of the



Magdalenians.' The cold disappeared. 'The broad-leaved forests drove before them the gloomy conifers. Deer, and before long, wild boar were plentiful; but Middle Stone Age man devoted himself to catching woodchucks and hunting snails! No need of a sorcerer' — a medicine-man of high degree — 'to help him collect snails, after the rain!' No need of an artist (though there is an art fascinating enough in the design of the painted pebbles). At any rate, no painting of snails upon a wall, in a deep and silent and sacramental cave. For painted caves, painted pebbles.

One by one at the Mas d'Azil I pick out these tender snails of Azilian man, cooked with garlic and with butter. This is the proper place to eat snails; and I enjoy the snails; and a large yellow dog — Middle Stone Age men domesticated dogs, as well as gathering snails — goes lazily from table to table, swinging its tail; but I do not forget these pre-Azilians of the cave and the shelter who rose above small deer and large deer, above snails, steaks and venison, who had no dogs; whose painting, drawing, engraving assured them their livelihood, whose art was practical and provident; and yet, beyond all mere cause and occasion, was also for them — by grace and tenderness and toughness of vision and meditation and execution — a spring of delight, an art the opposite of idle and vain.

Professor Sollas, when he had finished his new excavation of the cave of the Red Hunter of Paviland in 1911, wrote that it was not the place where the future historian would search for relics of the British Empire; but that if we knew enough, we should admire the ingenuity of the hunters, praise their courage, and sympathize with their aspirations.

*Out there among men living under the blue  
The saying goes, 'Man, to thyself be true!'  
In the hills, we've no time for such self-righteous stuff.  
Our saying goes, 'Troll, to thyself be enough'.*

They were not trolls, the artists of the cave; and the images they have left in the caves teach us, at any rate, that the condition of men is not always 'to themselves enough', which was the cry and condition of those trolls of *Peer Gyn*; is not always to be idle in spirit, lazy, unoriginating, uninventive, stagnant, decadent, and weary.





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